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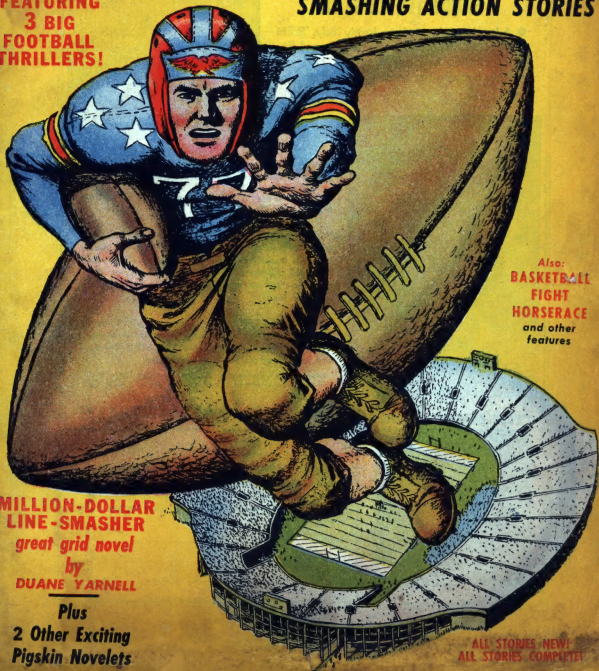
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COMPLETE SPORTS

VOL. 5, NO. 2 ALL STORIES NEW! JAN.—1947

★ ★ FEATURING 3 BIG FOOTBALL THRILLERS ★ ★

★ ★ SMASHING FEATURE-LENGTH NOVEL ★ ★

THE MILLION-DOLLAR LINE-SMASHER by Duane Yarnell

No, this wasn't football. It was mass murder, and Danny Gannon knew the new big-money coach didn't want a quarterback, he wanted a killer, he wanted a ruthless right hand man who'd make the team gain that extra yard if it meant crippling a couple of players to do it, who'd see that pigskin smashed over if he had to put the whole opposing team in the hospital!

★ ★ 3 EXCITING ACTION-PACKED NOVELETS ★ ★

BLOODY BASKETS (Basketball) by Roe Richmond

This hoop marvel was never the court-famous Mike Koska's kid, because Mike not only knew how to gun that leather through the meshes from any angle but he also had guts

FIST FEVER (Fight) by H. C. Butler

"You'll never be a great fighter," old Reper told Jimmy Steele, "until you develop that killer instinct!" But Jimmy still figured he could win the championship with fast footwork and a couple of hard fists!

TOUCHDOWN TROUBLE (Football) by Giles A. Lutz

You grabbed the pigskin and took off. You smashed at the piled-up line and the hole was there an instant. But it was funny, making touchdowns wasn't all there was to football by a long shot

★ ★ 2 THRILLING SHORT STORIES ★ ★

BRAIN-TRUST IN THE BACKFIELD by Richard Brister

Block, tackle, or run the ball, it was all the same to the kid. Because the fact that he was the greatest football player in Conference history wasn't what interested him anyway

BET ON THE BACK STRETCH! (Horse Racing) by J. J. Meany

In a cloud of dust they'd do it out in the struth, but rearing Blue Blazer's days of glory, Tom Crane knew what her comeback just had to be: Blue Blazer breaking the tape first again, whether in a photo finish or by five lengths!

★ ★ SPECIAL ALL-SPORTS FEATURES ★ ★

THE SPORT-O-QUIZ by James Mackie

WHAT'S THE SCORE? Sports Facts

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THE MILLION-DOLLAR

CHAPTER I

Pigskin Politics

THE MOMENT quarterback Danny Bannion walked into the State dressing room he sensed that something was wrong.

Danny was puzzled. These men had elected him captain of the State eleven for this, Danny's final season. And now he felt like a stranger among them.

He stood there staring at them. Danny was a large man for a quarterback, a big-boned six footer with wide



Bannion took a couple of steps before the opposing team closed in upon him!

All talking stopped and old friends turned away from him, lowering their eyes self-consciously.

shoulders and the graceful hips of a racing animal. Long, powerful muscles lay flat against his solid frame

THIS WASN'T FOOTBALL, THIS WAS MASS MURDER, THIS WAS A

LINE-SMASHER

By
DUANE YARNELL
Author "The Touchdown
Twins," etc.

THRILLING FEATURE-LENGTH GRID NOVEL!

Football, the new coach thundered, was a game for men, not boys, but Danny Bannion knew what the ruthless big-money mentor was really saying: Gain that extra yard if it meant crippling a couple of players to do it, smash that pigskin over if you had to put the whole opposing team in the hospital!



like rubber mats piled one upon the other.

"What's the matter?" Danny asked.

"Am I breaking out with small pox?"

It was Skinny Barker, a Phi house fraternity brother who nodded som-

CLEAN-FIGHTING ELEVEN AGAINST A PIGSKIN KILLER CREW!

berly toward the bulletin board. "Take a look, Danny. We're just as burned up as you're going to be."

Danny took a look. The starting lineup for today's pre-season practice game against the Alumni team had just been posted. Danny's name was not included on the list.

Angrily, Danny swung around. "Is Lippy in his office?" he demanded.

"He just got here," Skinny said. "And if you ask me, Danny, you've got plenty of room to beef."

A moment later, Danny raked his flat knuckles across the oak panel of the coach's office door. A thin, shrill voice called out an invitation for him to enter.

Coach Lippy Lucas was alone when Danny opened the door. A short, solidly built man in his late twenties, Lippy was the current darling of football circles. Lippy's head was small, bullet shaped. His gray eyes had a faint upward tilt, giving him a slightly Mongolian look. He had been coaching seven seasons. He had produced four high school champions and three junior college winners. This was his first season as a college coach and the fans were expecting it to be a breeze for him.

The State Alumni pressure groups, sickened by the long record of unsuccessful football clubs, had finally pressured the Board of Governors into hiring Lippy as varsity coach. Lippy's arrival had been marked by campus celebrations and much huzzahing. Yet somehow, Danny Bannion had never felt completely at ease around the man. Now, pinned down by those faintly arrogant eyes, Danny was even more uncomfortable.

"Well?" Lippy said blandly. "What can I do for you?"

Danny's own eyes were sober. "The team elected me captain, Lippy, and I feel an obligation to them. But I can't fulfill that obligation while I'm sitting on the bench."

Lippy sighed and buffed his nails against a herringbone lapel. "When I was hired to run this team," Lippy said, "I was given a one-year contract and an order to produce a winner. You're not my idea of a winning quarterback!"

"From the very beginning," Danny said, "I've had a feeling that you didn't want me in the lineup. I think I'm entitled to a straight answer. Why are you benching me?"

The Mongolian eyes narrowed uneasily, and for a moment Danny thought that he saw fear in them. That puzzled him. Why should Lippy fear him? It didn't make sense. Now, Lippy's eyes lost their uneasy look, grew cold again.

"You're benched," Lippy said, "because you've played lousy football, and because you can't follow instructions. You know what I'm talking about."

DANNY knew what Lippy meant and the knowledge brought a deep flush to his face. Several times during the past two weeks, Lippy had shown his irritation when Danny had refused to carry out Lippy's orders on the field. But in each of those instances, Danny had been on solid ground.

"You've ordered me to use Hunchy Horton every time we need a yard for first down," Danny said bleakly. "And I've refused because Hunchy isn't entirely over that bad knee he got in an accident last summer. I like to pick up a yard when we need it. But I won't cripple a man to gain a yard in any football game."

"A winner this year means a crack at a pro coaching job for me," Lippy's voice rose shrilly and his tone was fanatical. "I need a quarterback who's willing to drive his team. You pamper them, Bannion, instead of driving them. There may come a time when a decision on one play may mean the difference between a second best

team and a champion. I want a quarterback with guts enough to win, no matter what the cost. You're not that man!"

Danny had a hard time believing Lippy — until he took another look into the man's blazing eyes. What he saw there revolted him.

"You really mean it," Danny muttered, his voice filled with loathing. "You'd cripple a man like Hunchy Horton if it meant gaining an extra yard."

"I could put it a lot more delicately," Lippy growled. "Let's just say that to me, football's a game for men, not boys. If they can't take it, they don't deserve a place on the varsity."

Danny was too angry to discuss the situation any longer. He shook his head slowly, still unwilling to believe what he had heard, yet knowing that it was true. Lippy Lucas was coaching for Lippy Lucas's private benefit and he would do anything to win. Danny shrugged, helplessly, and turned and went out of the office.

Outside, in the hallway, he hesitated a moment in an attempt to draw himself together. Lippy Lucas had taken a big job on himself, benching his team quarterback and captain. Could Lippy get away with it?

Suddenly, Danny had an uneasy feeling that Lippy could get away with anything. The man was calculating and he was ruthless. But one thing was in Lippy's favor. Danny Bannion's play for the past two weeks had been spotty.

Until now, Danny had believed that he was going through a slump that would pass on. Now, it occurred to him that perhaps there was more to that slump than met the eye.

Which brought Danny face to face with a situation that had frequently aroused his curiosity: Lippy Lucas and his close relationship with the four freshmen members of the State squad.

This season, thanks to the elimination of the freshman rule, first year men were eligible for the varsity. Four new men, all freshmen, had reported for practice—Bronk Ellis, Vince Davis, Luke Martin and Ed Kassal. They were cocky, confident men and they knew what they were doing. In practice, they'd been sensational. And now they had been chosen for the varsity. Today, they would start against the Alumni.

Danny was remembering the night he'd stopped by Lippy's apartment to talk over a new play with the coach. That night, he'd found these same four freshmen in Lippy's apartment. Now, Danny was recalling other things. The nights, after practice, when this same frosh quartet had hung around Lippys' office after the rest of the squad had gone home. What was the basis of that close relationship? What hidden bond held these men together?

Was that bond strong enough, for instance, for the frosh to collaborate with Lippy in an attempt to make Danny look bad? Danny hated to think so. Still, Lippy had admitted that he wanted no part of Danny. Which could mean that Lippy had done everything in his power to make Danny look bad—so that he could not be criticized for benching him.

THREE or four men could make any quarterback look sour. A halfback like Vince Davis could be a step too slow getting down under Danny's passes—and people would say, as they'd been saying, that Danny had lost his passing eye. Or a lineman, like Luke Martin, could let a scrub tackler through to block Danny's punt—and people would say, as they'd been saying, that Danny wasn't getting his kicks away fast enough. Danny realized that he was letting his thoughts run wild, that this was dangerous speculation until

he had proof. But the suspicion lingered.

He started into the dressing room, then stopped outside the door, consciously aware of the argument that was going on inside. An argument of which Danny Bannion was the subject.

"I tell you," Vince Davis was shouting, "we should elect a new captain! What good can Danny do if he's sitting on the bench?"

"Shut up, freshman!" Skinny Barker said. "Danny's in a slump. Just wait'll he comes out of it..."

As the argument raged two things became clearly evident to Danny. First, the sentiment both for and against him was pretty evenly divided. And second, *the ringleaders in the attempt to get rid of him, to elect a new captain, were the four freshmen, Bronk Ellis, Vince Davis, Luke Martin and squat little Ed Kassal, the new quarterback who had taken Danny's place in the varsity lineup.*

For just an instant Danny thought of the many things at stake for him, all of those things dependent upon his success on the team during his final season.

There was his job with John Hildebrand's law firm after Danny graduated—provided, of course, the football-loving attorney did not decide to withdraw the offer. And there was Carole Mallory, lovely, mysterious Carole whom Danny believed in, yet did not completely understand. Carole Mallory, who had often said, "This is where I belong, Danny, near the State campus. And this is where I'll always be. Some day, I'll make you understand."

At the moment, Danny understood just one thing. Forces were at work to undermine him. Forces that would crush his plans, his future, unless he used his head, unless he recognized those forces for what they were and fought back against them.

Now, quietly, he walked into the dressing room and all talking stopped. Wearily, he said, "Come on, gents. We've got a date with the Alumni."

They went outside and they began to warm up in the lazy September sunshine. The State stadium was comfortably filled for the first time within Danny's memory. Long suffering State's football fortunes had turned. A victory feeling was in the air.

Lippy Lucas, the man responsible for that change of heart was right now, surrounded by the newspaper gentry. Danny edged closer, listened.

"I see you benched your quarterback," the *Clarion* writer said.

"Which only proves," Lippy conceded, "that I'll make any kind of switch in the lineup to win."

"Danny Bannion made honorable mention on a couple of All-American squads last season," the *Clarion* scribe reminded. "It's a big gamble benching him for an untried freshman."

"Untried?" Lippy paused, flushed momentarily, then flashed his teeth again. "That is, I've got a lot of confidence in him. I predict that within ten minutes, you'll be singing the praises of Ed Kassal, that you'll forget you ever saw Bannion."

Angrily, Danny went back to his warmup paces. He booted a few, pitched a few passes. Then the scrubs moved off and the varsity stayed out there and Danny walked slowly to the bench and that was the part that hurt.

On the bench, with time on his hands, Danny began to look about him. Toward the stands, toward the box on the fifty yard line where the local dignitaries sat.

John Hildebrand was there and he was looking at Danny across the distance, his big head immobile as a statue, his eyes grim and unpromising.

Danny sighed and turned away, feeling the implication back of John

Hildebrand's staring eyes. Hildebrand, a former State football star, had become one of the most celebrated lawyers in the country. He made no secret of his belief that football was a great builder of men. Nor did he mind letting it be known that he was looking around him for a young law graduate to step into his business, a man capable of taking over when John Hildebrand retired.

Which was where Danny Bannion came in. Danny was a senior in Law School. Until this season, he'd been more than a capable quarterback. He'd been, even with a mediocre team, slightly on the sensational side.

Last summer, John Hildebrand had invited Danny to his country estate for a week's visit. At the conclusion of the visit, Hildebrand had said, bluntly, "I think you're the man I'm looking for, Danny. A man shows his real character in a football game. I believe you've got what I want. I'm going to have my eyes on you next season."

John Hildebrand had his eyes on Danny all right. He had his eyes glued to the back of Danny's red neck. The starting whistle blasted. The first game was getting underway. And there sat Danny Bannion, the team captain, squarely in the middle of the substitutes' bench. . . .

CHAPTER II

The Calamity Kids

IT CAN happen only in college football. For years, a team can flounder through its seasons, never rising above mediocrity. Alumni groups can howl for a new football deal. Student body clubs can hold indignation meetings and pass resolutions and all the time the attendance continues to dwindle and the Board

of Governors spends anxious hours worrying about the bonded indebtedness on the stadium.

There is talk of abandoning football altogether. There is bewilderment and there is bitterness and all over the country the football writers point their fingers and say, "There is a college where football is dead!" And then, suddenly, a new coach is hired and a team begins to click. The fans come back. The old grads begin to crow. The stands fill up for pre-season practice games and everything is as it should be again. This is known as football hysteria. And this year it was happening at State.

The hysteria was here this afternoon, yet there were a few fans still sane enough to remember that last year, in mid-season, the Staters had found themselves, had won four straight games. Nor had those same fans forgotten that it was Danny Bannion, the quarterback, who had sparked his team through those wins.

Thus, against the clamor, a thin dissenting note was introduced by those few faithful who remembered. It was a plea that lacked unity, that was without unity, that was without organization or synchronizations. Yet it was there and Danny listened, gratefully, as it made itself heard.

"We want Bannion! We want Bannion!"

But the plea was enveloped by a tumultuous scream as the Alumni fullback kicked off to State's varsity. The kick was a long, booming one that drifted far downfield, spinning end over end.

Freshman Ed Kassal, Danny's successor, came up under it on a dead run. Kassal ran with a peculiarly deceptive motion, knees driving high, hips working on a cam.

A tackler drove for Ed's knees, but big Bronk Ellis threw a block and Kassal eased through a narrow hole. Luke Martin and Vince Davis, the

other freshmen starters, chopped their way through a barrier of bodies to form a protective, flanking cordon around Kassal.

The frosh quarterback twisted and pivoted and crossed the thirty and then, miraculously, he was out in a broken field. Another tackler dived for him but Kassal spun away, shooting his arm into the tackler's face without breaking stride.

The State fans, victory-starved for so many seasons, picked up the roar. Trapped, momentarily, Kassal feinted a lateral to a decoy and the Alumni tacklers fell for it, pulled over, leaving a narrow, unprotected lane between themselves and the sideline. And into this lane, like a projectile, thundered Ed Kassal. He was through the opening before the hole closed and then he was moving away, opening a gap, widening it. An instant later, Kassal went over standing up, an act that was to sell an additional thousand season tickets.

DANNY BANNION was as thrilled as anyone, but he was not swept away by the mass hysteria. He noted one thing, a thing that was growing more significant with each passing moment. Kassal had scored a touchdown and three blockers had followed him over line, protecting him from the rear. Was it coincidence that those three blockers all happened to be freshmen?

If it was coincidence, then the coincidental happenings of the next few minutes of play put a strain on credulity. The varsity kicked and the Alumni receiver was pinned on his own twelve yard line. The tacklers were Bronk Ellis, Vince Davis and Luke Martin. The three freshmen sensations, functioning as smoothly as if they'd been playing together forever.

Bronk Ellis was playing right guard. Luke Martin was beside him

at tackle. Three times in a row this pair made chumps of the Alumni line. Three times they smashed through to smear the Alumni backs before they could move upfield.

The Alumni kicked. Ed Kassal drifted back, took the ball on his own thirty-eight. He ran across the fifty before they surrounded him. Then, without seeming to look to his right, he whirled and tossed a lateral. Vince Davis, waiting in exactly the right spot, caught it near the sideline. The varsity was as surprised as the opposition—with but two exceptions: Bronk Davis and Luke Martin. They, too, were in precisely the right position. They were on the inside of the play. Bronk took one tackler and Luke took another and with the game less than three minutes along, a stunned crowd saw Vince Davis amble fifty yards, unmolested, for another sensational touchdown. Kassal kicked the extra point and it was State 14, Alumni 0.

There was no longer a thin cry of a loyal few. No single voice raised itself in a plea for a sight of Danny Bannion in the lineup. At the moment, only one man within the confines of that stadium seemed to realize that Danny Bannion existed. The man who remembered was Lippy Lucas.

"Bannion," Lippy said. "Take Kassal's place.

Surprised, Danny hit the deck, but his surprise was not so great that he missed the look in Lippy's eyes. Lippy was, unaccountably, very, very pleased with himself.

There were a few boos as Danny went out, but he ignored them. It was a little tougher to ignore the obvious when he reached his mates. The factional split was still there, but closer to the surface. Fully half the State varsity made no effort to hide their disappointment at Danny's entry into the game.

Almost immediately, Danny found

himself with his hands full. Again the Alumni failed to dent the solid varsity line, after taking the kickoff. Again they kicked back. Danny took the kick on his forty, but an enemy end nailed him before he could get underway.

In the huddle, Danny said, "We're going to roll. Let's try sixty four." He was looking at Vince Davis when he said it.

Sixty four. The ball straight to the quarterback, a short backward fade, then a quick, fast pass out into the flat. Danny watch his man, Vince Davis. He cocked his arm and fired. Davis turned on a burst, ran beyond the pass. He tried to reach back but the ball was behind him and it fell harmlessly free. Scowling, Danny tried it again, just to make sure. This time he gave a longer lead. But this time, Davis was slower. He leaped desperately, made a nice, one handed try that looked good to the grandstand, though it failed. The fans gave Davis a big hand for his attempt.

In the huddle again, Danny said, "You're a hell of a target today, Davis."

Vince Davis flushed, then grinned nastily. "Maybe if you'd throw two passes alike I'd know where to be to catch 'em. . ."

Watching the rest of the faces around him, Danny realized that they took his crack for an alibi. They were siding in with Davis. In his anger, Danny took the next one through the middle and ripped off six big yards. The ball was now near midfield with four to go for a first down.

A line buck by Hunchy Horton picked up the needed four, but when Danny helped Hunchy to his feet, he knew the big fullback was suffering.

"How's the knee?" Danny demanded.

"Not so hot," Hunchy admitted. "It needs another week of rest. . ."

"I'll lay off," Danny said.

He did. Scat Parsons picked up

eight on a sneaky reverse. Then Danny tried another pass. This one was too short and the fans began to boo. . . A substitute came in with a message from Lippy, a message that Danny received after his next pass was also grounded. It was fourth and two and the message from Lippy was: "Use Horton over tackle!"

Danny, watching Hunchy limp into position, decided against it. He tried the line himself. One and a half yards. Not two. The varsity surrendered the ball and the Alumni took over. And at that point, where the varsity had bogged down, Danny Bannion was withdrawn from the ball game.

Danny was burning with rage when he reached the bench. He was expecting an argument from Lippy. But no argument came. Again, Lippy seemed unruffled, completely pleased with himself. But Danny knew why he'd been jerked. He'd refused to drive Hunchy when driving him meant a possible loss of his services for the season. . . .

THE rest of the first half was more of the same. With Ed Kasal back in the lineup, the Staters clicked. They piled up touchdown upon touchdown. And so great was the acceptance of the varsity by the crowd that few people seemed to notice the passing from the ball game of one of State's standbys, Hunchy Horton.

Near the end of the first half, Hunchy pulled up lame and had to be helped from the field. Danny was burning inside. Too much work on a game knee that was not ready had done it. True, Hunchy had picked up many first downs before his knee gave way. Maybe Lippy thought it was worth it. But Danny didn't think so. How, Danny wondered, could Lippy afford to sacrifice his starting fullback—if he was sincere in his assertion that he wanted to come out at the

end of the season with a winner?

Danny got a partial answer a few moments later. Bronk Ellis was moved back to fullback to take Hunchy's place. Sam Caddo, a senior took over Bronk's old assignment in the line.

Bronk's conversion was smooth and effortless. Too smooth to satisfy Danny. In the final moments of the first half, Bronk literally ripped the Alumni line to shreds. And Danny's suspicions were complete.

When the half ended, Danny went straight to Lippy Lucas' office. His blue eyes were blazing and at the sight of Lippy he began to shout, oblivious of the other persons in the office with them.

"For a guy as smart as you think you are," Danny raged, "you do some pretty crude things!"

Eyes narrowing, Lippy said, "I don't follow you, Bannion."

Danny said, "You'll do anything to win. You don't care whose toes you step on or how many guys you hurt so long as it means a better job for you next season."

"That'll be about enough. . . ." Lippy began.

Danny said, "I've got a couple of things to get off my chest! You may be fooling some people but not me. Your four freshmen are ringers! Guys who play that kind of football didn't learn it in high school. And guards don't transform into fullbacks as fast as Bronk did unless they've played plenty of fullback before. . . ."

"You're talking yourself right out of your uniform," Lippy said, his voice a shrill, neurotic wail. "You. . ."

But Danny hadn't finished. "You want a winner, enough to kill a few players, if necessary. You knew I wouldn't drive men like Hunchy—even in a clutch with a championship riding on it. So I was dangerous to your plans. The easy thing was to get rid of me by making me look bad—

which your boys did, very beautifully. You were even willing to sacrifice Hunchy Horton—because you knew that Bronk Ellis could fill his shoes. It's a cute game that you're playing, Lippy, but some day, it's going to catch up with you. Your four wonder boys have played too much football to be palmed off forever as unknowns. They're ringers and you know it and when the public finds it out, God help your record, Lippy!"

The Mongolian eyes were cold and inscrutable and the bullet head was drawn, turtle-fashion, down against Lippy's shoulders.

"It's a nice theory," Lippy said, spacing his words evenly. "But it doesn't hold up. I don't know any other coach who would put up with such accusations—and I'm no exception. You can turn in your suit, Bannion. The sooner the better."

Danny's anger was still there, but the loss of his uniform had a sobering effect upon him. Danny wasn't wealthy. His small football scholarship had enabled him, thus far, to pursue his education. He'd counted on that scholarship to see him through the rest of the school year, to graduation. Without it, the outlook was hopeless.

This was no industrial town where jobs went begging. The four thousand college students were a drag on the labor market and tuition-paying jobs were not to be found. With Danny, it was graduating via a football scholarship—or nothing.

As Danny turned to leave Lippy's office, his temper cooled and he became aware that his outburst had been witnessed by a newspaper reporter, one Mac Andrews of the *News*.

Andrews was staring thoughtfully into space, as if he'd been totally oblivious of all that he had heard. Danny spoke to the reporter, but Andrews was still lost in thought and hardly returned the greeting.

Danny went into the dressing room and changed his clothes. For the next three hours he walked along the tree-lined paths within the campus grounds. Dusk came and lights began to twinkle in the frat house windows.

Finally, he turned his steps toward the Campus Sweet Shoppe where he knew that he would find Carole Mallory. He knew that, in fairness, Carole must be told that he had been thrown off the team. Telling her wasn't going to be easy. In fact, Danny decided that it was going to be about the toughest assignment of his life. But it had to be done. . . .

CHAPTER III

Scandal Rocks Football Team!

THE Sweet Shoppe was a small brick building nestled in a cluster of oaks just across from the Science Hall. The Sweet Shoppe was an institution patronized more for the social qualities it afforded than for the double chocolate eclairs that were dispensed there.

At the Sweet Shoppe, an undergrad could spend a complete evening for a nickle—the price of a coke. For his money he could listen to hot juke box recordings; tiring of this, he might hear whole pages of Shakespeare quoted by Rex Mallory, genial proprietor of the place. And between times, he could gaze fondly across the counter at one of the most beautiful brunettes ever to grace the State campus.

Rex Mallory owned the Sweet Shoppe, yet even a casual observer soon realized that but for the shrewd business sense of Mallory's daughter, Carole, the Sweet Shoppe would have been closed long ago.

Rex Mallory had been one of the greatest Hamlets in the history of the legitimate theatre—ten years ago. Why he had retired, what had happened to his fortune, or why he had suddenly turned up as the proprietor of the down and out Sweet Shoppe across from the State campus was a mystery that no one had successfully penetrated, including Danny Bannion.

A man of Barrymorian tendencies, Rex Mallory often absented himself from the Sweet Shoppe for long periods of time and it was during these periods that Danny noted the drawn, worried look in the dusky eyes of Carole.

Tonight, the Campus Sweet Shoppe was doing its usual business as Danny entered. Three coke customers were at the counter. A couple of moon-struck freshman girls were sighing soulfully in front of the juke box. Unnoticed, Danny eased quietly into a booth.

His eyes were on the girl back of the counter, tall, slim Carole Mallory. Her hair was long and glossily black, and it hung to her shoulders. She was twenty, a year younger than Danny. Mornings, Carole attended classes on the campus and the rest of the day she worked for her father at the Shoppe. Usually, there were dark, worried circles beneath her eyes. But tonight, unexplicably, her eyes were radiant.

Carole looked up, saw Danny. A smile passed between them and for an instant it seemed to Danny that they were the only two people in the room. She removed her apron and walked over to his booth.

"Let's get out of here, Danny." Her voice was softly husky and her dark eyes were dancing with excitement. "I have some wonderful news to tell you."

"Who'll take care of the Sweet Shoppe?" he asked. "Where's Rex?"

Her eyes clouded momentarily, then

she smiled again. "I . . . I'm not worried about him tonight." She turned, spoke briefly to one of the youths at the counter. "Take over for me, Tommie, like a lamb. If Dad comes back, tell him I won't be gone long."

Later, walking along the oak-lined path that led upward toward the blinking lights of Fraternity Row, Danny kept saying to himself, *Now is the time to tell her*. Yet somehow, he couldn't bring himself to the point of spoiling Carole's gaiety.

So he said, instead, "What do you want to tell me, Carole?"

Her fingers tightened against his arm and when she looked up at him, her dark eyes were shining. "Once, Danny, I told you that I'd never be able to leave this town, that any life we might have together would have to be spent near the State campus. You didn't understand. . . ."

"I didn't understand," Danny admitted, "but it was good enough for me. That's why I've tried so hard to get a job in this town after I graduate. . . ." He caught himself, feeling a deep ache at the thought of the job with John Hildebrand that might have been.

"Danny, I haven't tried to be mysterious. It's just that I've been afraid that things couldn't work out for us. I didn't want to talk about the thing that keeps me here until I knew that we were on solid ground. Now, after what's happened today, I know that they're working out. First, I want you to understand about Dad. Once, Danny, he was a great actor. . . ."

"One of the greatest," Danny said quietly.

"He was great only as long as mother was alive," Carole explained. "Then, her death did something to him. He loved her as few women have a right to be loved. Without her, life seemed hopeless to him. For seven years he tried to find himself. The papers poked fun at some of his es-

capades. But actually, he was a bewildered, lonely old man, trying to forget the loss that he'd suffered. When I grew old enough to understand, I decided to bring him here where he could be near the State campus."

"That's the part I can't understand," Danny said.

"My mother," the girl said, "taught Dramatics here at State. It was here that Dad met her and fell in love with her. Few people remember it today because Dad wasn't famous, then. . . ."

NOW, suddenly, a lot of things were becoming clear to Danny. He said, "So that's why you said you couldn't leave this town. Your father has found peace here, close to the scene of his greatest memories. You've helped him build a new life and you're afraid to leave him. . . ."

"I feel an obligation to Dad," the girl said, her eyes filmy in the soft night light. "He's like a child, really. The Sweet Shoppe is the thing that makes it possible for him to stay here. That's why, when business is bad, he goes off at a tangent. He's afraid that if the business fails, he'll have to leave. But Dad won't have to worry any more. Today, I signed a business contract that will make him financially secure for a long time to come."

Puzzled, Danny said, "What kind of contract?"

"A ten year contract for the concession rights at the football stadium, Danny. Dad is as happy as a new colt. He knows, now, that he can spend the rest of his days here near the campus where he met Mother. He'll be able to stand on his own feet, now, but I'll want to stay near to encourage him. Oh, Danny, after the way you beat the Alumni team this afternoon I know State is headed for her greatest season. It means so much to both of us. . . ."

Danny felt as if someone had kicked him in the stomach. From Carole's conversation he realized that she had been working this afternoon, that she had heard only the score of the game—and not that Danny had been kicked off the team.

It was also evident, and painfully so, that Carole assumed that Danny, as State's star quarterback, would find himself in line for the big job with John Hilderbrand, the moment he graduated.

He could see the picture forming in Carole's mind and for a moment his chest ached at the thought of it. It was a pretty picture. Rex Mallory, with his concession right at the Stadium, would have a new interest in life. This would leave Carole free to go with Danny when he took his position with Hilderbrand. At the same time, Carole would be living close to her father just in case he needed help. Yes, it was a pretty picture. But it was only a picture. For Danny Bannion was going to be lucky if he even graduated this season.

He looked at her, took a deep breath. But he did not get to tell her. Suddenly, he became aware of the commotion up the hill. Undergrads were gathering in the street along Fraternity Row. Even from a distance, Danny could hear the shouting, the indistinct jumble of emotion-filled voices.

"I wonder if it's a fire?" Carole asked.

"I don't know," Danny said. "Let's hurry. . . ."

But a figure came out of the night, stopped in front of them. It was Hoot Ormond, who played left tackle on the varsity. The red haired Hoot was Danny's room mate at the Phi House.

"Just the man I'm looking for," Hoot muttered.

"What cooks, chum?" Danny demanded.

Hoot had a pink newspaper. *A copy of the News*. Under the street lights, Danny could see that it was an extra. He could also read the headline and it put feathers in his stomach:

SCANDAL ROCKS STATE FOOTBALL TEAM!

"Take the paper," Hoot ordered. "But don't stop to read it now. Get yourself out of sight. But quick. Half the campus is looking for you. . . ."

"But why?" Danny demanded.

"Why were they looking for Benedict Arnold?" Hoot cracked wryly. "They want to lynch you, bub. When you blew your top to MacAndrews, you cracked things wide open."

Beside him, Carole said urgently, "Come on, Danny. Hurry. . . ."

Ten minutes later, Danny and Carole walked into the back room of the Campus Sweet Shoppe. There, for the first time, Danny scanned the story that had raised such a furor. He read:

State's great football team was beautifully torpedoed late this afternoon following this reporter's revelation that four of State's sensational freshmen have been playing professional football for the past several seasons in Hawaii.

The moment these facts were confirmed by this reporter by telephonic communication with Hawaii, the same facts were presented before an emergency meeting of State's Board of Governors.

Also present at the meeting was State's sensational new coach, Lippy Lucas, who denied, categorically, that he knew anything of the background of Bronk Ellis, Vince Davis, Luke Martin and Ed Kassal. Whether the Board believed his denial is only incidental. At least, they asked

for, and received, Lippy's resignation.

It is no secret that for many years State's President Stevens has been openly advocating the discontinuance of college football by the State eleven. Next week, Prexy Stevens will preside over the monthly meeting of the Board of Governors and you can bet your bottom dollar that, with this scandal to back him, he'll attempt, once more, to get an affirmative vote for abandoning football.

Credit for the exposure of this story goes to captain Danny Bannion, who was benched today in favor of Ed Kassal, who won't be with us any longer. . . .

When Danny finished the story he was furious. His charges had been substantiated. The four frosh, as he'd suspected, had played pro ball. But Danny felt no comfort from the revelation.

Instead, he was sick. Mac Andrews had handled the story clumsily. Instead of revealing his story quietly to the Board, he'd spread it all over the country, for certainly the press wires would pick it up.

In so doing, the reporter had provided football-hating Prexy Stevens with enough ammunition to kill football at State for many years to come. And Mac Andrews had given Danny Bannion full credit.

Danny looked over at Carole. Her face was white, her expression drawn and into her eyes had come that haunted look again. He could read her thoughts.

"I'm sorry, baby," Danny said huskily. "No football means no concession rights for you and Rex. It means you've got to keep going in this little two by four Sweet Shoppe. It means. . . ."

She tried a brave smile and his

heart went out to her. Her slim, cool fingers brushed his. "Don't worry, Danny. I'm not thinking of myself, or of Dad. I'm thinking of you. . . ."

That did it. Danny Bannion began to get sore. Grimly, he said, "There's too much involved for me to go down without a fight. Maybe it won't do any good, but right or not, Mrs. Bannion's little boy is going to start swinging."

Danny went outside, hailed a cab and rode up to the *Phi* House in Fraternity Row. The lawn was littered with papers and rubbish. The banister along the porch had been broken. The front door was off it's hinges. It had been quite a party.

Inside, he heard the sound of angry voices. Grimly, he listened and his suspicions were confirmed. His *Phi* Brothers were voting to throw him out of the fraternity.

Danny went inside. The living room was lined with angry-eyed young undergrads and when they recognized him there was a chorus of shouts, "There he is!"

Danny realized that the situation was fraught with dynamite, that the slightest spark would kindle the tinder that was their taut tempers.

Sam Caddo made a lunge for Danny, a blind, angry lunge with arms flailing. Coolly, Danny stepped aside and as he did so, his right fist clipped Sam neatly on the jaw. Sam went down and out. But cold.

The sight of Sam Caddo lying stiff upon the floor had a sobering effect upon them. Danny saw that Sam would come around in a moment and he used the ensuing silence to get through to them.

"We've got a rule here," he said, "that any member of the frat can have his chance to talk—and while he has the floor, the rest have got to listen."

"What right have you got to talk?" Skinny Barker demanded. "You shoot

off your face to the press and the whole campus comes up here and wrecks the Phi House, trying to find you. And now you want to be heard."

"Shaddup!" Hoot Ormond shouted. "Or maybe you want to keep Sam Caddo some company." Skinny Barker shut up.

Danny had the floor and for five minutes he talked. He told them everything that had happened. Finally, he said, "I didn't realize that a *News* reporter was in Lippy's office. All I knew was that Lippy was using ringers and that a lot of guys, including myself, were getting the business because of it. . . ."

He paused, studied their faces. Then he felt a surge of warmth when he realized that they had believed him. "It would have been smarter to tell my suspicions to the Board of Governors and let them make a quiet investigation," he admitted. "But what's done is done. The important thing is that Prexy Stevens has a good excuse to try to abandon football. Do you guys want to take your peevies out on me—or do you want to work with me to try to keep football going?"

Skinny Barker was still skeptical. "What do you think you can do to save things now?"

Danny said, "In three days we open against Templeton. The meeting of the Board of Governors isn't until next week. The Prexy wants to abandon football because he says a losing team gives the school bad publicity, and he probably feels that now we wouldn't have a chance—"

"I see the point, Danny," Hoot Ormond said. "You think that if we smear Templeton—that if we make a quick recovery after what happened today, the Prexy will lose a big talking point."

"Right," Danny said. "We can win without Lippy Lucas and his four pros. And if the Prexy tries to cancel

out the rest of our season after we've drubbed Templeton, the Alumni clubs are going to set up an awful howl."

Hoot Ormond was grinning. "I believe," he said, "that it's up to the Phis to lead State from the football wilderness. Our only chance to get square with the campus is to back Danny to the limit. Now, I make a motion that the meeting adjourn."

The meeting was adjourned and Danny felt a rising tide of optimism within him. Here, among his brother Phis, he had found a small island of friendship in a veritable sea of hatred.

Later, he went upstairs with his roommate, Hoot Ormond. His room was a shambles. His bed had been overturned. Drawers had been pulled out, their contents emptied. It gave him a strange, uneasy feeling, knowing how close he'd come to being there when the storm struck.

"I'm quite a popular guy around here," Danny muttered.

Hoot prepared to make a bed for himself upon the floor.

"Don't let it throw you, Doc. You can make 'em forget. The Templeton game is coming up. Remember?"

"I remember," Danny said quietly.

CHAPTER IV

"Now Let's See What YOU Can Do!"

TODAY, there was no banter as the State squad dressed for their game with Templeton. Things had been happening fast, so fast that the squad was still a trifle upset.

First, with Lippy Lucas gone, there had been the necessity of hiring a coach. Prexy Stevens, acting on his own, had inserted Bing Dawson in the coaching spot as a temporary measure.

Bing Dawson was a big-hearted,

friendly guy of ancient vintage. For years he had been handling the State swimming teams. But he was no football coach. The squad knew it and Bing knew it but they were both stuck with each other.

Now, ten minutes before time to take the field, Bing wandered into the dressing room. A short, balding, fat little man, he came in and looked unhappily around him.

"Let's not try to fool each other," Bing said. "Prexy Stevens gave me this job, not because I can handle it, but because he knows darned well I can't. I may as well tell you kids that I think this is going to be your last game. The Prexy is still burned up about all the Publicity the school has been getting and he's doing plenty of lobbying with the members of the Board of Governors. He wants football abandoned and a loss today won't help our cause."

Danny said, "We're not going to lose!"

"I dunno," Bing said. "You got no decent fullback with Hunchy out of the lineup. You need a coach who knows how to run a team, which I don't. I'm sorry, lads, but it looks like the deck it stacked against you."

"This," Danny said, "I've got to see. . ."

Danny soon saw. When the team went out onto the field, Templeton was already working out. They were big, fast footballers and they outweighed State ten pounds to the man.

The atmosphere in the stands didn't help. Since the loss of Lippy Lucas and the four pros, the sports writers had been singing the blues for State. They'd said that State had been reduced to a second rate club again, that they were headed for another losing season. And so the fans had stayed away from this game by the thousands. Right now, Danny knew that there was less than two thousand fans on hand. Two thousand highly

critical fans who began to boo the moment the Staters put in their appearance.

Danny knew that the State fans were still disappointed at the loss of the team that had drubbed the Alumni, even if four of those men had been pros. Mass hysteria still had them in its grip. Later, the fans would realize that using pros in collegiate football was out of the question. Later, when they could view the matter sanely, they would be fair with Danny. But in the meantime, it was going to be rugged.

Danny put his team through a short, fast workout. As he worked them, he felt the tension within them. They were tightened up, not relaxed the way he wanted them. Too much was at stake today.

A whistle blasted and Danny moved toward the center. A coin spun and he listened while the Templeton captain made the correct call. "We'll kick," the Templeton captain said.

DANNY went back behind the goal line and a moment later the ball was thundering down toward him. He caught the ball five yards deep in the end zone. He was up to the fifteen before the visitors began to filter through.

A tackler dived for his thighs and Danny spun and shot his arm and broke away. He took a couple of steps ahead and then a Templeton tackler hit him from the side, dropped him.

It was first and ten on the seventeen. Up in the stands, a State rooter cupped his hands and yelled through them, "You got rid of Ed Kassal, Bannion. Now let's see what you can do!"

Danny didn't like the inflection in that voice. Plenty of fans believed that he'd shot off his face to the press simply to get his starting position back. It was going to take a lot of showing to convince them that he

was as good a man as Ed Kassal had been.

In the huddle, Danny said, "The fifty series. . ."

It was T-formation, with Danny a yard back of the center. The ball snapped back. He feinted to Scat Parsons, then whirled and jabbed the ball into Nick Riley's belly. Nick smashed into a stone wall and was dropped on the scrimmage line.

The next play in the sequence was a feint to Nick, then Parsons over the opposite side of the line. But Templeton was strong through the center and the play picked up but a yard.

Again Danny got the ball. Again he feinted to his flanker on the right. Then, quickly, he faded back. Skinny Barker was out in the flat, running parallel with the scrimmage line. Danny cocked his arm and fired. Skinny went high into the air and pulled it down, but a Templeton secondary man dropped him in his tracks.

It was fourth and two and Danny was in a quandary. He knew that touchdowns against Templeton would come hard this afternoon for Templeton was tough. Against a rugged defense, Danny knew that the best offense was surprise. He also knew that what he was thinking was very dangerous football. Quickly, he made up his mind.

The Templeton defense dropped back for the expected kick. In the huddle, Danny said, "Forty-three—and heaven help me if I'm wrong."

Scat Parsons dropped back into kick formation. Danny was a yard back of center, half a yard to the right. The ball snapped, not to Scat, but to Danny. The State line charged low and hard and Danny pounded his shoulders into a narrow hole.

He took a step, then the hole closed and big black-uniformed enemy linemen rose up in front of him. His legs pumped hard and he swore under his

breath as the weight bore him to the ground. A moment later, the chain was brought out to measure. It was close, but not close enough. The attempt was half a yard short and Templeton took over, the ball deep in State's territory.

The fans were screaming for Danny's scalp and he thought, ironically, how he'd pulled this same play last year, how it had resulted in a winning touchdown. If you gambled and won you were a smart quarterback. But if you lost, you were a bum.

Templeton lined up fast. Their scatback hit the slot between right tackle and guard exploded into the secondary. Nick Riley made a diving, one-handed tackle, but the play picked up seven.

The same play, over the other side of the line was good for a first and ten on the State fifteen. Danny shifted his defense to a seven man line to try to plug the holes.

But Templeton had tricks aplenty. They faked a line buck, then their quarterback faded and cocked his arm. Danny saw the two ends coming down, saw them cross in front of him.

The ball was flying in his direction and three men went into the air together. Danny's fingers brushed the pigskin, deflected it into the air again. Sickened, he watched Templeton's left end reach out and gather it in. They were beyond the goal line and it was a touchdown. A moment later, Templeton converted and it was 7 to 0, with State trailing.

Danny knew why his team could not get to rolling. Under Lippy Lucas, four ex-pros had been filling key spots in the lineup during practice sessions. The team that Danny was running today had never played together as a unit. They had possibilities, but they had not had time to develop. And today they were playing without the services of their star fullback, Hunchy Horton.

It was a tough outlook. Yet Danny was not giving up. They were playing ragged football, now, and his only hope was that before the game ended his club would find itself.

But it was a forlorn hope. During the rest of the first half, Templeton controlled the ball almost at will. They made three long marches. Marches that died within inches of the State goal line. Once, a fumble stopped them from scoring. Twice more, they were denied touchdowns by off-sides penalties. At the end of the half it was still Templeton 7: State, 0.

Wearily, the Staters stumbled off the field. Danny went down the ramp beneath the stands. He came to a corridor that crossed the ramp and he turned left instead of continuing toward the State dressing room.

He came to a small office door, quietly pushed it open. Carole Mallory was inside, sitting back of a desk. One look at the girl's dark eyes and Danny knew that something was not right.

Danny said, "What's the matter, baby?"

She looked up at him and tried to smile but her full red mouth was quivering. "We haven't sold enough hot dogs to pay for the help," the girl said. "Besides, I bought five thousand too many. . . ."

"Maybe," Danny said heavily, "they'll keep until next week."

She stared at him, her eyes miserable. "Why kid ourselves, Danny? There won't be a game next week . . . or any week for a long, long time, I'm afraid!"

WHAT could he say to her? Because he had blown the lid off in front of a *News* reporter, a great season had been ruined. He tried to rationalize. Suppose he'd kept quiet? Then, Lippy and his pros might have turned out a winner for

State. That would have meant comparative riches for Carole and Rex Mallory, for with huge crowds, the concession sales would have been heavy.

Carole said, "I know what you're thinking, Danny. But you're wrong. No matter how this season turns out, it's better that Lippy and his gang are gone. . . ."

He knew what it was costing Carole to say this, yet, instinctively, he realized that she meant it. No matter what the loss of a winning team meant to her, personally, she was on Danny's side. His eyes softened and he reached over, patted her hand. She was his kind of woman.

"Keep your chin up, baby," he said. "We're not whipped yet."

It was an odd psychology for a man who was, at the moment, the most universally detested footballer on the State campus. If any person should have felt beaten, that person was Danny Bannion. But somehow, Danny felt that there was still hope.

Danny was not alone in his wishful thinking. There is something in the minds of a football team that makes them resent a kicking around. The State varsity had been pushed all over the field during the first half. Slowly, it was making them mad.

The third period saw more of the same. Templeton was piling up yardage and only the determined goal-line defense of the ragged Staters prevented them from adding to their 7 to 0 lead.

Then, midway through the final period, the Staters found themselves. Their anger crystallized and their resentment against Templeton welded them into a single, cohesive unit. They were no longer ragged. For the first time that afternoon, they were a team with a common object, a common goal.

They took over on Templeton's forty when a bad pass on fourth

down prevented the Templeton full-back from getting off a punt. Danny, sensing the change that had come over his team, took a quick look at the clock. Seven minutes.

The varsity lined up. Danny took the ball and faded. A Templeton end dived for his knees, but Danny shook him off. Coolly, deliberately, he

"Scat . . . watch it," then tossed the lateral even as he went down. Scat caught it and kept ambling. The enemy safety man drove him out of bounds on the four yard line.

And on the next play, Danny Bannon circled his right end, screened by a wall of perfect blocking. Not a Templeton tackler got through the screen



watched Nick Riley through the line. He counted to himself, cocked his arm, fired. Nick looked back over his shoulder and there was the ball, waiting. Nick crossed the thirty before they pinned him down.

Quickly, now, Danny went to work. On the first play, he snaked through the center on a quick opener. He broke into the startled secondary, cut back toward the sideline. Scat Parsons was running out ahead of him. Danny watched a Templeton halfback drift up, launch his tackle. He yelled,

and he pounded over standing up.

The kick for point was important. Danny took his time, swinging his leg easily, carefully. The ball started to soar. Then a black jersey loomed high in front of him. An arm went up, deflected the ball. It passed by the upright a yard too wide. It was Templeton 7, State 6. And the clock was ticking away. . . .

Templeton, frightened, now, came roaring back, trying for another touchdown. They drove deep into State's territory. It was two minutes,

now, and Templeton had the ball on the State thirty.

In his safety slot, Danny tried to diagnose the next play. He saw the ends streaking down. He backed away, keeping ahead of them. Not until he saw the ball in the air did he make a break for it.

One Templeton end tried to cut Danny down, but he leaped over the man, then cut between the pass receiver and the ball. He flung himself into the air and his big fingers clawed at the ball. He touched it, held it, and when he came down he was near the side line and he was running.

He was a big man but he was fast and there was not a man within a dozen yards of him. Danny raced across the twenty, the thirty. Half the Templeton team was knifing toward him, trying to push him out of bounds.

But Sam Caddo came to the rescue. Sam threw a rolling block that swept two men aside. Danny cut back, reversed his field and as he crossed the fifty he picked up Albie Dale and Nick Riley.

They drove straight toward the frantic Templeton quarterback, the last enemy tackler still having a chance. Albie Dale tried a block, but the Templeton quarterback stepped nimbly away. And it was at this moment, while the man was off balance, that Nick Riley nailed him. Grinning, Danny Bannion made the rest of the jaunt in a breeze. And, an instant later, he kicked the goal that made it State, 13; Templeton 7.

Which was the way it ended, a few seconds later, with Templeton filling the air with prayerful, desperate passes. Going off, Danny felt at peace with the world. He knew that there were rocky roads ahead of him. But he tried to be philosophical about it. The best any man could do was cross one hurdle at a time. Templeton had been the first hurdle and

State had opened her season with a win. The next big move would be by Prexy Stevens, State's football-hating President.

CHAPTER V

Fighting Talk

DANNY BANNION found little consolation in the Sunday sports pages. The sports writers, even those who were sympathetic to State's cause, were blunt and to the point.

They warned State's followers that the victory over Templeton was in the nature of a fluke. They pointed to the overwhelming number of yards that Templeton had gained over State. They made the same comparison in first downs gained. In every department except one, State had been outplayed. But the one department in which State had excelled, fortunately, was in the total score.

Danny had called a meeting of the varsity for early Sunday morning. The meeting was to be held at the Sweet Shoppe. Shortly after nine he left the Phi house, following the path that was a shortcut through the park.

In the park he met a big, ruddy-faced man with graying temples. The man was throwing a ball into a clump of bushes, teaching a leggy, liver-spotted bird dog pup to retrieve. The man was John Hildebrand and when he recognized Danny his eyes grew dark and his facial muscles stiffened.

"Bannion," he said, "have you got a minute?"

Danny felt uneasy. "Sure thing," he said.

"What I've got to say," John Hildebrand muttered, "I say as an old State football player, not as a man who once considered you as a law partner. I think a lot of State University and

it shames me when I read so many unfavorable comments in the paper, comments that might never have been, had you used common sense.

"I'm in full accord with getting rid of those four men who were professionals. But I'm not in accord with the sensational manner in which it was done. If you suspected something wrong, the least you could have done would have been to give the Board of Governors a chance to act. They could have handled the manner quietly and there would have been little bad publicity."

Danny said, miserably, "I was mad when it happened, I didn't realize a newspaper man was listening. I . . ."

"A man who gets so angry he doesn't know what's going on around him has no future in the law business," John Hildebrand muttered. "Good day, Bannion."

Danny nodded soberly, then continued on toward the Sweet Shoppe. He found the entire varsity waiting for him when he arrived. Carole was there and she gave him a quick, bright smile. He knew that she was keeping her chin up.

Danny noticed Rex Mallory. He was a tall, distinguished looking man. His face was lean and angular and, at sixty, his profile could still make many a feminine heart twitter.

"What's new, Hamlet?" Danny asked.

Rex Mallory made a circle with thumb and forefinger.

"I can't squawk, Danny," Rex said. But there was no life in his tone and Danny knew that Carole hadn't been able to hide from him the fact that their concession at the Stadium had started off with three lemons.

Danny looked around him and he liked what he saw. The varsity was in good spirits, despite the pounding they'd taken yesterday. They still had plenty of fight in them.

"I asked you guys down here so

we could talk things over," Danny said. "We're still in the dark about the future of football here at State, and we will be until the Board meets in the Prexy's office tomorrow. But in the meantime, we can talk over the things we did wrong yesterday. Until we find out different, we can assume that we're going to meet every team in the conference."

Sam Caddo grinned, sheepishly. "After the clout you gave me the other night, Danny, I oughta be sore at you. But before we get started talking football, I'll tell you something."

"I'm listening," Danny said.

"I've been talking to a lot of guys. What happened the other night was spur of the moment stuff. A few hot-heads got the idea that you'd stabbed your school in the back. The mob scene was the result. But tempers have cooled out, now, and most people are back to normal. A few of 'em think that Lippy Lucas was telling the truth when he said he knew nothing about those guys and their pro records. Those same guys think you should have given Lippy a chance to get a story ready before the emergency Board meeting. Naturally, those guys are a little sore. But after what you did yesterday, a lot of people are seeing your side again. I figured you'd like to know."

Danny said, "Thanks, Sam. It helps."

AT that moment, the door opened and a skinny, fuzzy-cheeked youth came in. He was blinking his eyes rapidly and his Adam's apple was bobbing nervously. He reminded you of a toad sitting in a hail storm.

Danny said, "This is the right place, Emery. Thanks for coming over."

Emery Bayliss fluttered inside. He was twenty-four. Since graduation, he had spent the past four years

working in the Administration Building. Though a grotesque looking individual, Emery Bayliss was a man of efficiency and a series of steadily upward steps, had finally worked him into a position of great trust. He was confidential secretary to Prexy Stevens. The things that went on behind the Prexy's closed door were things that never passed Emery Bayliss' lips. But Danny Bannion knew that Emery Bayliss had once been a Phi. He was banking heavily upon this knowledge.

"Emery," Danny began, "we don't want you to violate confidences. But we do need some information. First, though, maybe you can tell me this much—why does President Stevens hate football?"

Emery Bayliss looked uncertainly about him. Sam Caddo made a motion with his hand and the varsity broke into the Brother Phi song. Emery listened and his heart was touched.

Swallowing hard, he said, "For the past several years, State's team hasn't done well. There has been much unfavorable publicity about the team as you all know. But despite this, the football coach has always drawn a better salary than the President."

"So it's a matter of jealousy," Danny muttered.

"The Board of Governors has set a ceiling on the President's salary," Emery said. "But there's no ceiling on the head coach's salary. Naturally, with such an inequity. . . ."

"I get the point," Danny said. "Now, here's another question. How does he feel about abandoning football?"

Again Emery Bayliss blinked nervously. Then, the memory of the varsity's rendition of the Brother Phi song still fresh in his mind, Emery blurted, "It looks bad for the team. You see, the President is a very busy man. For years, when the team was

losing, Alumni groups pestered him constantly to hire a new coach. Finally, under pressure, he recommended to the Board that a good man be hired. That was Mr. Lippy Lucas. But it seems that Mr. Lucas took advantage of his position and brought some players to State whose backgrounds were filled with impurities. Naturally, President Stevens was angry. So now he thinks he has a perfect right to ask the Board of Governors to vote against continuing football."

Danny whistled, softly. "What are the chances of the Board agreeing with him?" he demanded.

Emery Bayliss said, "There are six members of the Board of Governors. The President can recommend but he cannot vote. From the tenor of the conversations he's been holding with Board members, I'd say that three men are for stopping football and the other three are opposed."

"In case of a tie vote," Danny said, "what happens?"

Emery looked ill. For the first time he seemed to realize how much he had told. Then, at the same instant, he also seemed to realize that there was very little more to tell. So he decided to go the rest of the distance for his brother Phi's.

"You may not realize it, gentlemen," Emery said, "but State is not too secure, financially. During the past several years, we have received several large cash gifts from a certain wealthy New York business man, a person named Thomas Allison. The President has reason to believe that there will be more cash donations. . . ."

"What does Allison have to do with it?" Sam Caddo demanded.

"I'm getting to that," Emery said. "The President knows that the Board will not do anything to annoy such a generous individual. And the President also has reason to believe that

Thomas Allison does not like football. Confidentially, I think that it is his plan to invite Allison to give his views on the subject."

Danny groaned audibly. "In other words, if it's a tie vote, you think that dissenters will weaken if State's big dollar man tells them that he thinks football is a waste of time."

"To use the vernacular," Emery said quickly, "you hit the nail in the eye."

Skinny Barker said, "Maybe we could work on this guy Thomas Allison before the Prex gets to him. . . ."

"I'm afraid that wouldn't help," Emery warned. "He's a very crotchety individual and he's extremely allergic to anyone who tries to tell him what to do."

"All of which means," Danny muttered, "that we'd better pray for a cloudburst tomorrow—and for an indefinite postponement of that Board Meeting."

Emery said, "Well, I must be running along. I have to attend a class in finger painting."

"Paint one for me," Sam Caddo said. "And thanks for the information, Emery."

"You won't breathe a word," Emery warned.

"I'll choke, first," Danny assured him. He watched the little man leave. Emery was a peculiar little duck, but somewhere beneath his frail ribs there was a heart as big as a bucket. Thanks to Emery, Danny now knew what the team was up against.

He looked at Hunchy Horton who was still wearing a bandage on his knee. "What do you think, Hunchy?"

Hunchy shrugged. "I'm optimistic, personally. Let's go ahead and plan our strategy for the rest of the season. If we get the break we're hoping for, we'll at least be ready."

"Good idea," Danny said.

THEY spent the rest of the morning on skull practice. They went over many of their plays. Then they discussed some new ones. Bing Dawson, the new coach, had admitted that the team could do a lot worse than allow Danny to run them. The team had agreed. So it was that Danny found himself both captain and coach, in practice, if not in name.

When the session was breaking up, Danny said, "The team to beat is going to be Tech. Luckily, we catch them the last game of the season. . . ."

"If we play a last game," Hoot said soberly.

Danny's eyes were bleak. "We'll know sometime in the morning," he said.

The rest of that day was a nightmare for Danny. That night he couldn't sleep. And all during the following morning, he sat in Corp. Law, III, totally unaware of the significance of the lecture that was being delivered by the instructor.

At noon, he hurried over to the Administration Building, hoping to find Emery Bayliss. But Emery was not there. Resignedly, Danny turned his steps toward the Sweet Shoppe for a bite of lunch.

Emery Bayliss was waiting inside the Sweet Shoppe. "I thought I'd find you here," Emery said triumphantly.

Danny began to breathe jerkily. He braced himself, said, "Okay, Emery. Tell me the worst."

Emery Bayliss grinned. "I was in the Board meeting, keeping the minutes. The vote was three for football to three against. Then, there was a knock and an old man with a red beard came in. I'd never seen him before, but I'd seen his picture. It was Thomas Allison."

Danny groaned. "You're breaking my heart," he said.

"It's funny—Thomas Allison hasn't

been on the State campus in all the years I've been here. Yet there he was at the very moment they were talking about him. He said that it was chance that brought him there today. I'm so excited. I'm going to record the information for an essay on telepathy. . . ."

"For cripe's sake, Emery. Give!" Danny begged.

Now, for the first time, Emery Bayliss got down to business. "Oh—it didn't last long. President Stevens asked him what he thought about continuing with football. Thomas Allison said he thought it was a fine game. Two members of the Board reversed themselves and the next vote was five to one to keep football going."

Danny felt as if he'd been pumped full of hot coffee. The warmth was spreading into every part of his anatomy. It was a great feeling. He looked at Carole and her dark eyes were dancing again.

"Thanks for the information, Emery. And remind me to get you a season pass on the fifty yard line."

Emery beamed, then frowned. "Just one thing puzzles me. Thomas Allison never did say *what* it was that brought him here today. He just shook hands with the Board, then bade them all good-bye. He's as queer as they come."

Suddenly, and for no explainable reason, Danny Bannion felt as if he had been clubbed. He was thinking of something Emery has said: ". . . an old man with a red beard came in. . . ."

He looked at Carole and she nodded affirmatively. Together, they made a lunge toward the rear door that separated the Sweet Shoppe from the living quarters. Rex Mallory was back there and when Rex saw them, he backed slowly toward the dresser, holding his hands behind him.

Carole said, "What's in your hands, Dad?"

Sheepishly, Rex Mallory brought his hands out in front of him. "Well, as I live and breathe," he said. "It's my old red beard!"

Back of them, they heard a shriek. "Merciful, merciful heavens!" Emery Bayliss moaned. Then there was a loud thud as Emery's body hit the floor.

Rex Mallory, alone, was the only one who seemed to be deriving any pleasure out of the situation. He was smiling, the flushed, happy smile that you see only on the face of an actor after he has made his tenth curtain call.

"Never, in all my career as an actor," he said, "have I played a role so well. And never before have I aroused enough emotion to make a man faint."

Carole Mallory looked at Danny Bannion. Then together, they stared admiringly at Rex Mallory and it was as if they were seeing the Mallory of old.

"I hope," Rex said apologetically, "that I didn't do wrong. Thomas Allison was an angel for several of my productions on the New York stage. I worked from an old picture in my scrap book and my make-up job was perfect." A puckish look came into Rex's eyes. "I wasn't thinking of myself when I did it. I was thinking what it meant to you kids, to every student on the campus to keep football alive at State. I . . ."

Carole let out a happy shriek, flung herself into her father's arms. "Darling, don't apologize. You were wonderful, simply wonderful." Then Carole began to laugh hysterically and Danny, seeing the humor of the situation, joined her.

In the meantime, Emery Bayliss awakened. He took one look at what he considered three very crazy, hysterical people. He leaped from the floor and fled. . . .

CHAPTER VI

Single Wing, with Bannion Back

THE news that State's Board of Governors had decided to continue intercollegiate football, despite the bad publicity that their team had received, was a cause for moderate rejoicing on the campus.

The papers, particularly the local ones, devoted much of their space to the news, seizing every overlooked angle, hashing it and rehashing it.

Thus it was that an item about Lippy Lucas that might otherwise have received wider coverage, was all but crowded from the sports pages. But Danny Bannion read the item and it gave him plenty to think about.

Now, it was Saturday again and State was meeting Southern University, a team that was rated to finish somewhere near third or fourth in the conference. It was neither a poor team nor a flashy one. But it was a hurdle that had to be crossed.

Danny was sitting on the rubbing table, watching a sepia-skinned trainer wrap tape around the instep of his kicking foot. It was quiet for a moment.

"Did any of you guys see that piece in the paper about Lippy Lucas?" he asked.

They looked up at him, interested, shaking their heads.

"It seems that Lippy was able to convince another school that he had nothing to do with the scandal here at State. Anyway, Lippy just signed a one year contract as backfield coach at Tech!"

The news was electrifying. Danny didn't have to draw a picture to make them understand. These men had played for Lippy Lucas. They knew that he was a shrewd, sharp operator, a man who would do anything to win.

And now he was working for Tech's brain trust and Tech was the team that State would have to beat to win the conference title, to get the Bowl bid that they were all secretly hoping for.

"They're gonna be tough enough to beat," Sam Caddo said. "But with Lippy Lucas helping 'em, they're going to be a lot tougher."

"Anyway," Danny said, "it's something to think about. But boy, how'd you like to go right down to the Tech game with both outfits undefeated? What a chance to give Lippy a kick in the teeth in the big game of the season!"

"If," Skinny Barker muttered, "Lippy doesn't give us a knife in the back, first."

Which, exactly, was what Danny had been thinking. Lippy Lucas was a dangerous man when the chips were down. And if State got on an extended winning streak, Lippy would bear watching.

Danny tested the tape on his ankle. Satisfied, he eased his sock, then shoe on over it. He said, "Sam, you're up against that Matson guy this afternoon. Don't forget to watch him in the pileups. Remember last year?"

"I've got two stitches in my skull. I remember, Danny."

"Another thing," Danny said. "They've got a passer who's a Fancy Dan—but he doesn't like to get his hair mussed. He can do with some rushing."

Right end Skinny Barker grinned. "That's my department, Danny."

They went outside. There, Danny experienced the first jarring note of the day. He'd hoped that the flood of publicity during the past week would result in a huge crowd. It didn't. There were about three thousand fans present, which was twice last week's throng. But it was still 27,000 fans short of capacity. Too many people still regarded the open-

ing victory over Templeton as a fluke. The only way the fans would come back would be for State to convince them that they still had a ball team, despite the loss of Lippy Lucas and the four freshmen ex-pros.

The visiting captain won the toss and Southern elected to kick. A moment later, a long, wobbly kick came down the right side-line. Nick Riley, Danny's blocking back, took the ball on a dead run and carried it back to the twenty-five.

Danny studied the Southern line. The big power was a grinning, 210 pound young giant from the zinc mines of Missouri. A character of All-American stature, one Slugger Matson. Against Matson, Sam Caddo looked puny by comparison.

Danny called signals and as he did so he watched Sam Caddo's body stiffen in anticipation. The ball came back. Danny chucked it to Nick Riley, who gave it to Scat Parsons on a spinner. Scat ducked into the line behind a charging Sam Caddo. But there was no opening. After the pile-up, the ball was still on the scrimmage line.

In the huddle, Danny looked at Sam Caddo. Sam's left eye was already growing puffy. "Do it just once more," Sam said. "That baby is too cute for his britches!" Sam Caddo was mad.

THIS time, there was no spinner.

Danny got the ball and he dived in behind Sam. This time, Sam gave the zinc miner the business. Sam charged low and when he was beneath big Matson, he suddenly lunged upward. Matson spilled off Sam Caddo's back, fell head down. And Danny, grinning, yelled, "Good boy, Sam!" as he plunged through the hole.

Danny split the secondary wide open. He was through before they could close in on him. He crossed the

thirty, then the forty. He saw the Southern safety man knifing in on him and he cut toward the sideline. Danny tried to outrun the guy, but a long, diving tackle caught him as he reached the midfield stripe. He was knocked spinning, out of bounds.

State was moving. Danny observed the shift of the enemy's defensive tactics. They pushed their roving center up into the line, making an orthodox 7-2-1-1 defense.

Again Danny got the ball in the T. Again he shoved the ball at each of his flankers as they went by him—but he held the ball, then whirled and faded back. Nick Riley was out in the flat. Scat Parsons was crossing behind him. Danny drew a bead on Scat, but out of the corner of his eye, he was watching Skinny Barker race unmolested down the right sideline.

Slugger Matson smashed through, dived at Danny. But the State quarterback ducked the tackle, then straightened and drew back his arm. The pass was a long, lazy spiral and it settled into Skinny Barker's hands as he stepped across the twenty.

The Southern safety man tried, frantically, to pull over. But Scat Parsons knifed in from the flank and mowed him down. Skinny went over standing up.

For three thousand fans, they didn't do so badly. They howled and they pounded each others' backs and before the noise died down they had another point to yell about. Danny's placekick split the uprights and it was State, 7; Southern, 0.

Southern swarmed back, out to get their revenge. They ran Danny's kick back to the thirty. Then they began to pour their plays through their stalwart, Matson. But Danny was satisfied with what Sam Caddo was doing. Sam was smaller, but faster. He was charging Slugger Matson first, taking a lot of the sting out of him.

Southern was marching. Three yards on a plunge. Two on a reverse. Five more through Matson and a first down on the forty. But Danny wasn't upset. Matson was their big gun and Sam Caddo was making him work for every yard he opened up.

Another thing warmed the cockles of Danny's heart. His team was playing as a unit again. Pete Moran, at roving center, was diagnosing plays like a man with a crystal ball in his head. He was backing up the weak spots, hitting the right place at the right time. In the secondary, Nick Riley and Scat Parsons were keeping all eligible pass receivers bottled.

Southern tried a pass, but Scat knocked it down. Then they went back to their ground game again. They tried to run a play through Sam Caddo, but he went under Matson again and Pete Moran sandbagged the ball carrier for no gain. It was third and ten and Danny knew that they'd be passing this time.

They did. A short, sharp pass out in the flat. It connected, but Scat Parsons was dog-tailing his man all the way and dropped him in his tracks for a six yard gain.

Danny half expected a kick with four yards to go. But the Southern quarterback tried Sam Caddo again. And Sam rose to the test. He locked bodies with Slugger Matson and it was a stand-off. The ball carrier had to ad-lib his way around the end, searching for a hole. Pete Moran dogged him and greeted him with a tooth rattling tackle when he broke through. The play picked up two yards and the Staters took over.

In the huddle, Danny was triumphant. "Sam, boy, you've bottled their Big Bertha and all they've got left is pop guns. Let's go to town again."

They went to town. Danny started it with a sneak through the center for four. Scat Parsons circled the end for seven. Danny tossed to Skinny Barker

for another nice gain. Danny went in behind Sam Caddo for three more. When that play stopped, Sam's nose was bleeding and the referee was blazing away with his whistle.

The referee told Slugger Matson to keep his hands in his pockets in the pileups henceforth and forever after, then paced off fifteen big ones for holding.

On the very next play, Danny set up his own version of what an end-around should be. It was a very nice version and it paid off at the rate of six points when Gabby Saxon carried it over. Again Danny converted. And now State was leading 14 to 0.

THE half might have ended that way but for a bad break near the end. State had the ball on their own twenty and a bad pass went over Danny's head. He whirled and chased after it, but the ball took a bad hop, just as he got his hooks onto it. He tried to turn to lunge for it again, but his foot slipped and he went on his hip pockets. A charging hunk of Missouri manhood in the person of Slugger Matson charged past him and glommed onto the ball. It had rolled beyond the goal line and it was good for a Southern touchdown. The kick was good and thus it was that the Staters left the field with a 14 to 7 margin.

Danny stopped off in Carole's office, beneath the Stadium.

"One thing about a poor concession business," Carole said, smiling, "is that it gives me a chance to watch a part of the game. You've got yourself a ball team, Danny. Congratulations."

He leaned forward, kissed her ear lightly. He knew that Carole's spirits were high, despite the poor business. Carole had faith in the future.

"Wait'll next half," Danny said. "We'll moider 'em."

It didn't turn out that way, exactly.

Sam Caddo's brilliant first half had taken a lot of steam out of him. Danny pulled him early in the second half for a rest and before he could find a capable substitute to plug the gap, Slugger Matson tore the right side of the State line to shreds. The result was a touchdown for the visitors. A touchdown compounded on a line smash behind Matson, then a tricky lateral that caught Danny and Seat Parsons flat footed. Again the conversion was made and now it was knotted at 14 all.

The rest of the game was a shooting match, with both teams hammering away at each other with their Sunday punches. Right down to the wire it looked as if it would end in a tie.

Then, with seconds left, with Southern deep in their own territory and setting up a punt, Sam Caddo made up for all the bumps and bruises he'd suffered that afternoon. He smashed through Matson and flung himself in front of the kicker. Hoot Ormond fell on the ball for the recovery.

They were twenty yards from pay dirt and they had time for maybe one or two more plays. Danny debated. The Southerners had deployed their secondary to blanket every strategic spot. A pass would be dangerous.

This time, the formation was a single wing, with Danny back. He made no attempt to pass. Calmly, he dropped the ball, swung his leg easily. He saw it leave his toe, watched it lift above the clashing lines. A hand clawed the air and Danny's heart stopped as that same hand slapped at the ball. But the ball lifted higher, cleared the obstacle. And a split second later it dropped between the uprights for three beautiful points and the ball game, 17-14.

It was a tired but happy crew that slugged off the field that afternoon. They'd won their second straight and

next week they would hit the road.

In the dressing room, Danny listened to the banter going on around him. Sam Caddo was arguing with Lou Pollit about whether or not Slugger Matson had been wearing flesh-tinted brass knucks.

Gabby Saxon was telling everyone about the Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena on New Years. Hunchy Horton was assuring one and all that within two weeks, his knee would be ready for combat again. Pete Moran and Albie Dale were arguing over a blonde.

The feeling was in the air. A feeling of normalcy, of satisfaction. The old wounds were healed and State was on the march again.

Momentarily, at least, Lippy Lucas was completely forgotten. . . .

CHAPTER VII

Enemy Territory

TONIGHT was the big night at the Phi House. It was the event of the year, the annual autumn Prom. The rugs had been rolled back and the brothers, Phi, had worn many a blister waxing the huge oak floor in the downstairs living room that ran the complete length of the house.

A hot ten-piece band was doing a new Moon-June number and dozens of Phis dressed in their collegiate best, were circling the floors, partners in their arms.

Danny Bannion was dancing with Carole and her dark, faintly scented hair was close against his face. He was at peace with the world. And for good reason.

Danny Bannion was secure in the knowledge that he was Quarterbacking a team that was going places. The past two Saturdays, the Staters had

been on the road, playing in enemy territory.

Two weeks ago they'd been guests at Great Western and what they had done to Great Western's conference chances was about as insulting as wiping your muddy feet on the guest towel. That one had gone to State by a 27 to 7 margin.

Last week, against the Mountaineers, the going had been rougher. It had taken three and a half periods to push over a score. But Danny's end run had done it and they'd copped their fourth straight by a 7 to 0 count.

Four days from now, State was meeting the Carlton Cats. Danny knew that this would be their biggest test so far, for the Cats had lost but one game, and that by the narrow margin of a single touchdown in a high scoring game against Tech.

Carole looked up at Danny. "What're you thinking?" she asked softly.

"I'm thinking that if we get over the Carlton Cats, there won't be a thing to stop us until we hit Tech on Thanksgiving. . ."

"I should feel insulted," Carole said, her eyes dancing. "I spend two days getting my hair fixed a new way and you don't even notice it. Instead, you think of football. . ."

Danny colored, then realized that she was pulling his leg. "That hairdo is slick," he said.

"Will you be able to use Hunchy in the Carlton game?" Carole asked.

Baffled, he shook his head, "What a female," he grinned, drawing her closer to him.

Sam Caddo danced by. "Danny, have you seen Bing Dawson? He was around here awhile ago, looking for you."

Danny shook his head. A moment later, he saw Bing standing over by the orchestra platform. The usually genial little man had a harried look in his eyes. Skinny Barker cut in on

Danny and Danny said, absently, "I may be gone a little while, Carole."

Bing Dawson caught Danny's eye and nodded toward the veranda. A moment later, they met outside. Bing dropped his bulk heavily into a porch swing and Danny sat on the porch rail in front of him.

"I'll start at the beginning," Bing said. "When Lippy Lucas took over in September, he talked the Athletic Director into providing a lot of jobs around the gym for football players."

"I know all about it," Danny said. "And that's one thing I'm grateful to Lippy for. Plenty of our guys wouldn't be able to make it through school without those jobs they're holding. . ."

Bing said, "Lippy talked fast and he got fifteen extra jobs for his boys. The Athletic Director agreed to pay the salaries out of the increased gate receipts."

"And the gate receipts have been lousy," Danny said.

Bing nodded and his tone was doleful. "This isn't one of Prexy Stevens' tricks to throw a harpoon into the team, Danny. It's a simple matter of economics. The Athletic fund is in the red. Without money to pay out, fifteen footballers are going to have to lose their jobs."

DANNY BANNION felt as if someone had just chucked a brick at his skull. Most of State's players were having a tough enough time getting along. Most of them were working their way through on State-provided part time jobs. A loss of fifteen of those jobs was going to hit the team hard.

Most of the men affected would be scrubs, for naturally, the varsity had been better taken care of. But Danny Bannion knew only too well how important his scrubs were. They were the guys who were out there every day, the cannon fodder kids, without

whose competition there could be no scrimmage session.

"When does the cut go into effect?" Danny demanded.

"Right now!" Bing said. "I just found out about it."

Quickly, Danny consulted his small address book. He had names and addresses of every man on the squad. He checked off fifteen names and handed the book to Bing.

"Get Sam and Hoot to help you. Locate every one of those guys. Send taxis after 'em if necessary. Tell 'em to meet me at the Sweet Shoppe in an hour."

"It's as good as done," Bing said.

It took more than an hour. It was almost eleven o'clock when Danny got them together. He gave it to them cold, pulling no punches.

"Effective at once, you guys have lost your gym jobs. How many of you can stay in school without jobs?"

It seemed that none of them could. Lonny Blades said, "I earn fifty a month in the gym and I just get by. Nobody in town can hire a football player because of the odd hours he has to work. So there's no use kidding myself. Without a job, I'll have to quit school and go to a city where I can earn enough dough to get back in school next semester."

The rest of them nodded, grimly. They were all pulling an oar in the same swamped boat. Danny knew, only too well, what the loss of these men would mean to the team. In addition, there was a terrific morale factor involved. The squad was keyed up for the Carlton Cats. News of this latest crisis would have a bad effect upon them.

Desperately, Danny said, "Somehow, we'll solve the problem. But it's going to take time. Give me until after the Carlton game. What say we all meet here next Saturday night at eight? By that time, I may have some good news for you."

Reluctantly, they agreed to stay on through the week. After they were gone, Danny, Rex, and Carole went over a list of possible jobs that might be gotten for them. The list was small and the odds were great. But at least it was a starting point. Danny had invested too much work in the team to have it torpedoed out from under him now. He glanced at his watch, whistled softly. It was nearing midnight.

But as he started to leave, the door opened and in came Emery Bayliss, necktie askew, his wild eyes blinking rapidly. Emery was upset.

"I've been chasing all over looking for you," Emery said. "Here, take a look at this letter. It's a carbon of the one Prexy Stevens wrote this afternoon. I had an awful time getting away with the carbon."

Danny glanced at the letter and what he read made his blood run cold. It was a routine letter from President Stevens to Thomas Allison, the rich donor whom Rex Mallory had so recently impersonated. There was one significant paragraph:

"... and in closing, I wish to express my regret at the shortness of your recent visit to my office. There were many things that I wanted to talk over with you and I solicit another visit from you at your earliest convenience. . ."

Danny's brain was in a turmoil. He lowered the letter and then he saw, for the first time, that Rex Mallory was standing at his shoulder. Had Rex read it? If so, the man was completely nerveless, for his face was inscrutable. Danny decided that Rex hadn't read it.

Which was well and good for the moment. This was something that Danny hadn't foreseen and he knew that it could mean plenty of trouble. He realized that the moment Thomas Allison received a letter about a visit that had never taken place, there

would be an investigation. Prexy Stevens was too sharp-eyed not to notice certain quaking characteristics about his confidential assistant. Danny knew that Emery Bayliss would be the first man to break down and tell the truth, if and when an investigation did come.

Which pointed to more trouble ahead. But soon. Once Rex Mallory's impersonation of the red bearded millionaire was discovered, the fat would be on the front burner.

It would mean the cancellation of Rex's five year contract for concession rights at the Stadium . . . a contract that Danny felt was due to start paying off within a very, very short time.

Danny spoke, guardedly, trying to keep Rex in the dark.

"When was the letter mailed, Emery?"

Emery Bayliss was quaking in his shoes. "This afternoon. Honestly, I can never forgive myself for what I have done. I . . . I addressed the envelope to Calcutta, India. I . . . I don't know how I'll explain it to President Stevens when the letter comes back . . ."

Danny was doing some fast calculating. A letter might get to Calcutta and back within fifteen days by air-mail. Until that time, Prexy Stevens would not suspect anything wrong. But when the letter was returned, State's President would certainly see to it that it reached the right man the second time.

"By sending the letter to a phony address," Danny said, "you've given me two weeks to think of an out. In the meantime, Emery, keep your lip buttoned."

"I hope you think of something good," Emery said miserably.

"Yeah," Danny muttered. "And so do I."

After Emery had gone, Carole looked at Danny and said, "What's it all about, Danny?"

He shook his head, forced a grin. "It's nothing serious, baby." The last thing he wanted was for Carole to worry about this latest mess. "Let's forget it, huh?"

The girl frowned, then shrugged and he was glad when she changed the subject.

He had a cup of coffee with Rex and Carole and when he said good-bye for the evening, Danny felt more strongly than ever that neither Rex nor Carole had suspected the contents of that letter. Which took one load off him. For the next two weeks, he was going to have enough on his mind without having to worry about the Mallorys.

Two things were staring Danny in the face. He had until Saturday night to find jobs for fifteen men, or lose them for the season. And, now, an even greater crisis was looming. Stevens was going to discover that he'd been hoodwinked—unless Danny thought of something. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

Wanted: Jobs for Footballers

DANNY BANNION lay back against his green metal locker, eyes closed, chest heaving. He could feel the bubbles of perspiration forming between his hot back and the metal door behind him. His nose felt as if someone had been using it for a punching bag and his mouth had the faint salty taste of blood.

He opened his eyes and the effort made his head ache. The rest of the varsity looked as badly disheveled as Danny felt. Sam Caddo's face looked as if a horse had walked across it. Skinny Barker was off in a corner trying to fix a strap on his shoulder pads where a collar tackle had torn it loose. The line of battered Staters

waiting to get to the rubbing table looked like a meat market queue.

It had been a rugged first half. . . .

Danny got up and glanced at the wall clock. In just a few minutes, they would be going back outside. He said, "What's the matter with us? Why can't we get going?"

Lonny Blades made a wry face. "You know what's wrong, Danny. More than a dozen of us know that this is gonna be our last college football game—unless we come up with jobs, but quick."

Danny said, "We'll talk about it tonight at the Sweet Shoppe." He was stalling and he knew that *they* knew it. He had beat his brains out canvassing the town for jobs for footballers. But due to the odd hours footballers could work, nobody wanted to hire them.

Wearily, he said, "They're leading us 19 to 7—and we've still got time to catch 'em."

A sub was looking at his scratched nose in a wall mirror.

"Now I know why they call 'em the Carlton Cats," he said.

Danny lapsed into silence. Today, for the first time, the fans had taken the Staters seriously. More than ten thousand had turned out, hoping to see State extend her win streak.

Today was the day to win—for a victory over the tough Cats would show the football world that State was a power to be reckoned with. A win today would mean a capacity crowd next week. While a loss would put State back in the football doldrums.

Beset with so many annoying problems, Danny Bannion was beginning to get sore. "These babies need a lesson," he muttered. "Let's go out and give it to 'em!"

The crowd gave the Staters a nice hand when they took the field for the second half. Danny felt a little better.

The situation was still far from hopeless.

The Cats kicked off and Danny took the ball on his five. He slashed his way for thirty beautiful yards before they tackled him. He didn't call a huddle. Instead, he began to spout signals, a note of urgency in his voice.

The ball came back. Danny feinted to Scat Parsons, then charged off the weak side of the line. A small hole loomed between tackle and guard. He powered his shoulders into it, shoved hard with his driving legs and he was through.

The secondary closed in on him, but Danny swung away from them, toward the sideline boundary. Gabby Saxon crossed in front of him and laid a tackler low with a body block. Danny hurled the pileup and rocked into high. He crossed the midfield stripe and the crowd was on its feet, screaming.

But it was not to be. A Cat tackler lunged in from the flank and shoved him out of bounds. The ball came back into play on the Carlton 47.

Danny tried a spinner with Scat Parsons carrying it. Scat picked up two yards. Nick Riley added two more and on third and six, Danny called a huddle.

"I know you guys feel lousy," he raged, "and so do I. But I'm not lying down on the job. Am I gonna have to do all the work or do I get some help?"

Scat Parsons, his temper flaring, muttered, "Chuck me that kidney bean again."

It started as a delayed line buck, Danny carrying it. But as Scat swept past him, Danny handed the speedster the ball. Scat skirted the end, swinging wide. Skinny Barker turned the Cat end inside the play and Scat was beyond the scrimmage line and going fast. He ran all the way to the twenty before they nailed him.

Danny pounded up behind him.

"For a Beta, not bad," he said.

Scat began to grin. "I see what you mean," he said.

The rest of the team fell into line and suddenly they were an outfit again. Their troubles were forgotten. They were playing this game for blue chips, forgetting, for the moment, the many bridges yet to cross.

THERE was snap and precision in their movements as they lined up for the next one. Danny took the ball a yard back of center, pirouetted and ran back four steps. When he turned, Skinny Barker was halfway down to the end zone. Meanwhile, Hoot Ormond was a stride behind, protecting him.

Danny fired a fast, bullet pass, calculating Skinny's speed to a fraction of a second. As Skinny crossed the line, he turned his head and leaped high and there was the ball, waiting for him. Hoot Ormond was leaping, too, driving his shoulder into the guts of the frustrated Cat safety man. Skinny made the catch in pay dirt and it was a touchdown.

A moment later, Danny added the extra point with one of his educated dropkicks and now it was Carlton, 19; State, 14.

The crowd came to its feet and gave out with an ovation such as had not been heard in the Stadium since State's last conference championship year, ten seasons ago.

The Staters, listening, grinned at each other. This was a new experience for them. When, a moment later, Danny sent a kick spinning into the October sky, the State line swept down the field like dash men, evading blockers, knifing through the Cats, swarming in on the ball carrier. Sam Caddo made the stop on the Cat nineteen.

The Cats tried the center of the line, but it was a rock of strength and the play gained nothing. The Cat

quarterback faded to pass, but Skinny Barker and Lou Pollit smashed into him before he could get the ball away and it was third and nineteen.

The next play took the form of a punt out of danger. But Hoot Ormond knifed his way through the line and leaped high in front of the kicker. The ball smashed into Hoot's chest, then bounded away crazily. Skinny Barker had a chance to fall on it, but Sam Caddo was running along at his flank. So Skinny swept two Cats aside with a rolling block and it was Sam who recovered, a yard beyond the goal line for a touchdown.

This time, Danny missed, but it didn't seem important. The rambling Staters were out in front, now, by a 20 to 19 margin. State was playing, now, like a team inspired. If this was to be the last game for many of them, then it would be a game to remember.

The Cats tried to come back, but they were playing madmen. Their line plays bogged down before they could get started. In desperation, then, they took to the air. But a smart State secondary laid back, waiting. When the time came, Danny took an interception in midfield, tossed a lateral out to Scat Parsons and the State left half ran unmolested for another touchdown.

For all practical purposes, the game might have ended at that point. For it was then that the Cats folded completely. As it turned out, Danny's backfield ran wild during the remainder of the final half and when State walked off, they had nailed up a 43 to 19 victory.

The State cheer leaders refused to call it a day and never had the *Siss-boom—bah, State!* sounded better to Danny. Then, abruptly, he remembered. . . .

Again he told his fifteen jobless men to meet him at the Sweet Shoppe at eight that evening. And again he had a short session with Bing.

"After the crowd we drew," Danny insisted, "we should have some money—enough to get the guys their jobs back!"

Bing shook his head and his eyes were sad. "I've gone into that with the Athletic Director. But it's no dice. When Lippy took over, he made bills like a drunken mariner. New sod for the field. New uniforms. New showers for the dressing room. The fund will still be in the red if we draw capacity crowds all the rest of the season. I'm sorry, Danny."

"What about some of the rich Alumni boys?" Danny asked desperately.

"And open ourselves to another charge of professionalism? Use your head, Danny!"

"Yeah," Danny said glumly. "I see your point. We're whipped."

THAT NIGHT, it was a very sober group of footballers who gathered at the Sweet Shoppe. And because there was no point in kidding them, Danny said, "It's hell, having to toss in the towel at this stage of the game. But I can't find jobs for any of you."

Lonny Blades forced a smile. "Well, I guess this is good-bye, then, Danny. It's been nice knowing you. . . ."

They started to shuffle toward the door when Rex Mallory let out a yell. "Hey, wait—all of you. I think I've got the answer."

They hesitated, Danny as puzzled as the rest of them.

"All you need," Rex said, "is a place to stay and something to eat . . . and maybe a couple of bucks a week for spending money. So here's the way we work it. The Sweet Shoppe is losing money and I'd be better off if I closed it up. We'll buy some cots and you fellows move in here . . ."

Lonny's face fell. "I don't want charity, Hamlet."

"Wait'll I finish," Rex said, his eyes

shining. "I need men to help me with the Stadium concession business. It takes Thursday and Friday nights to get ready to sell the stuff, then it takes Sundays to clean up the mess. Today, we didn't have enough help and next week it'll be worse. So you go to work for me. Free beds, free food—and say five bucks apiece a week for tooth paste and stuff. When the football season's over, and you don't have to practice nights and play Saturdays, you should be able to find half way decent jobs."

Danny started to protest. He knew that Rex wasn't losing money at the Sweet Shoppe, that closing it would mean a financial loss. But before Danny could say anything, he caught Carole's eye. She shook her head, warned him to be quiet. Never had he seen such radiance as was on her face at this moment. He couldn't understand it.

"Please, fellows," Carole begged. "Dad really wants to hire you."

That did it. To a man, they jumped at Rex Mallory's offer. Arrangements were made quickly. They would move into the Sweet Shoppe tomorrow. Soon, the happy footballers drifted out, enjoying their new lease on life.

After the team members left, Rex Mallory looked at Carole and said, "I think I'll take a walk, honey. The campus should be beautiful, tonight."

Danny watched Rex leave, knowing that within the next hours, Rex Mallory would be reviving memories as he walked down the oak bordered paths where once he had walked with a woman.

When the door closed, Danny swung around, looked deeply into Carole's eyes. "Have you gone crazy, baby?" he demanded.

She murmured, "Don't you understand why I'm happy, Danny? For years, Dad has been depending upon me for everything. Now, suddenly, he's finding himself. He's asking peo-

ple to depend upon him. Oh, Danny, no matter if Dad can't afford to hire those boys, it's the finest thing that's ever happened."

There was logic in the girl's words, logic that warmed Danny's heart. The girl had gone through years of disappointments to rehabilitate her errant father and now she was close, so close to success . . .

AT that very moment, in a tiny Post Office in Darwin, Australia, a sun bronzed mail clerk, bare to the waist, picked up a letter and glanced at the face of it. The upper left hand corner bore the return of a University somewhere in the United States.

The mail clerk yawned, glanced at the address, then casually tossed the letter into an airmail sack that, one hour from then, would be aboard a plane bound for Calcutta, India.

CHAPTER IX

Too Many Touchdowns

UNTIL the afternoon that State decimated the Carlton Cats, the public was only lukewarm over State's chances. But the Carlton victory was the fifth in a row over conference competition. And nobody had to point out to the public that State was playing in the toughest conference in the country.

Almost overnight, the public made a rush to climb onto the State bandwagon. News services, which had been all but ignoring the Staters, now sent their ace reporters to prowl the State campus in search of human interest stories.

And it was in this department—the department of human interest—that the reporters were able to go to town. The press literally adopted Danny's team as their own sentimental favor-

ites to win the conference crown, to draw the Rose Bowl bid that almost certainly must follow.

When Zambanga University visited State the Stadium was a sellout. And Danny's gang arose to the occasion. Hunchy Horton, his leg completely mended, supplied the punch through the center that had been lacking. State squeezed through that one by a 21 to 14 count and the thirty thousand fans nearly tore the Stadium down.

On the Monday morning, following the State victory, a nationally famous sports writer released the following story to his 534 papers:

Last Saturday I came to State, I saw State—and State conquered my heart! Here is a football team that has overcome almost every kind of obstacle this season and is still winning!

In the first place, rising costs have cut the State budget to the bone. It's a school with a great old name, but with a flat, empty shop in the region of the pocket-book.

Next, State started her season under a cloud when four ex-professionals decided to enroll. That came within an ace of causing football to be abandoned. It's no secret around the campus that State's president Stevens was pretty fed up with the bad publicity his team had given the University, nor that if the Prexy had had his way about it, the team would have been broken up after the Templeton game. Fortunately for State, however, that didn't happen.

The latest crisis was the threatened loss of fifteen men when their janitorial jobs in the gymnasium were cut out—due to the dwindling athletic budget. A team with lesser spirit might

have given up. But not the kids from State.

They moved into a building that was formerly known as the Sweet Shoppe and here they're living today. Several nights a week, they slice pickles and unpack hot dogs and on Sundays, they work in the Stadium to clean up the mess. The joke around the campus is that these kids keep alive on chocolate eclairs, provided by Rex Mallory, genial owner of the ex-Sweet Shoppe.

Yes it's a grand saga, that of the Chocolate Eclair Kids. Quoting State coach, Bing Dawson: "Don't give me the credit. Give the credit to Danny Bannion, the guy who'd give his arms to keep the team together."

So it's orchids to Danny Bannion, the kid whom Lippy Lucas said wasn't good enough to start the season against the Alumni. It's more orchids to Danny for the way he's inspired his team against every conceivable kind of odds — against a disinterested student body, against a Prexy who wanted to call it quits.

Next week it's State against Thorpe—and just five days later, on Thanksgiving, it's the Chocolate Eclair Kids against their traditional enemy, Tech, with the mythical championship of America riding on the outcome. My heart and my money follows State.

Danny was naturally pleased when he read that story during an early Monday morning Study Hall period. But there was an angle that hadn't occurred to him. It took Emery Bayliss to point it out that noon hour.

"The President is very upset," Emery said, his Adam's apple bobbing nervously.

"What's the matter with the

Prexy?" Danny demanded.

Emery said, "He's a peculiar man, Danny. He was dead set against football at first—but recently, he's been pretty surprised as well as pleased to find State so successful. But one thing still plagues him. The sports writers keep embarrassing him by reminding the public that he tried to abandon football. He's rather sensitive and instead of letting him enjoy a winning season, the press keeps poking fun at him."

Danny said, "I can see his point, all right."

"As team captain," Emery said, "the President has the feeling that you're still against him. So I'm afraid that when that letter comes back and when he finally discovers how he was made such a fool of, he's going to suspect that you're in on it. I'd hate to think of what would happen if he discovered the, er, subterfuge before your game with Tech."

Danny felt a sinking in his stomach. That letter again! Momentarily, he'd forgotten it. Desperately, he said, "Emery, when the letter comes back, why can't you just destroy it?"

Emery's small, underslung chin jutted firmly. "I . . . I can't go that far, Danny. Please don't ask me to do it . . ."

Danny felt a wave of sympathy for the miserable little guy. He knew how Emery felt. "I withdraw the request," he said quietly. "You've been more than swell, Emery. But I would like one more thing from you. We're leaving for the Thorpe game on Thursday. If the letter comes back while we're gone, get in touch with me. The only chance I've got is to get to Thomas Allison before the letter does and tell him the whole story. Maybe he's got a sense of humor . . ."

"I—I'm afraid you'll be disappointed," Emery said dolefully. "But I'll do as you ask. If the letter comes back, I'll phone you . . ."

ON Thursday, the team made a sleeper jump that got them to the Thorpe campus the following noon. Once again, the press surrounded them at the station. And it was while the good-natured give and take was going on between the States and the press that Danny picked up an additional piece of information.

"You guys had better hold your best plays under lock and key. Because if you don't, Tech is gonna have them."

Danny looked at the reporter who had said that. "How do you figure it?" he asked.

"Tech sent one of your old pals over here to scout you. Ever hear of Lippy Lucas?"

Danny's heart started hammering and his temples throbbed. Lippy Lucas again! And Lippy, who knew football the way Einstein knew his multiplication tables, was going to be in the stands with a notebook and a pencil, watching State, not missing a trick . . .

The next afternoon, just before game time, Danny got his team together and laid it on the line. "We're playing this one under wraps," he said. "I knew Tech would scout us and most scouts we could fool if we only worked a series once. But we can't get anything past Lippy . . ."

They played the game under wraps. Theirs was a straight, orthodox brand of football that neither revealed their real power, nor took too much out of them. They went into the final period with a comfortable 14 to 6 margin.

What happened to State after that might have happened to any team in the country. It wasn't sloppy football. It wasn't carelessness. It was just the breaks.

The first break came when Danny, standing on his own goal line, prepared to kick out of danger. A Thorpe end was charging in at him and Hunchy Horton made a diving lunge to cut the man down. For a split sec-

ond, one of Hunchy's legs swung through the arc of Danny's kick. The ball hit Hunchy, bounded backward. Danny dived for it, recovered. But he was over the goal line and it was a safety. That made it 14 to 8, now, and it still didn't look dangerous.

Danny said, "For insurance, we're going after another touchdown."

The Staters started a march that carried them to midfield. Danny's short passes were connecting. He pitched another at Skinny Barker, but a Thorpe halfback made a one handed swing at it to bat the ball down. Instead of hitting it into the dirt, the ball went flying off at a tangent. A Thorpe end, who had been completely blocked out of the play, was just picking himself up when the ball arrived in front of him, chest high. He tucked it beneath his arm and began to scoot down the sideline. There wasn't a man within a dozen yards of him when it happened and Danny Bannion watched, nauseated, as the big 14 when up on the Thorpe side of the scoreboard.

Nor did it help his temper any, a moment later, when a perfect drop-kick made the score Thorpe, 16; State, 14.

State had just four minutes to score, or see their season's hopes blasted. In the huddle before the kick-off, Danny said, grimly, "We've got to take our wraps off, Lippy Lucas or no Lippy. We've got to get that score back!"

THUS it was that State was forced to reveal her best Sunday punch. Danny took the Thorpe kickoff and carried it all the way back to the forty.

They were using the T, with Danny in the slot. The ball snapped and he fainted to Hunchy, then followed the big fullback into the line. They didn't find a hole. They made one. Hunchy took out the roving Thorpe center.

Danny went five yards, then whirled and chucked the ball as Nick Riley cut back of him. Nick drove straight for the left sideline after the lateral, sucking the entire Thorpe secondary over with him. And when he reached the sideline, Nick whirled and passed a long, lazy lateral almost the complete width of the field. The slowness of the pass gave Scat Parsons time to get over under it and he caught it on the dead run.

Meanwhile, Danny had kept going straight ahead. He saw the safety man racing frantically toward Scat and Danny launched his body, cut the man down. Even as he rolled, he saw Hunchy Horton take out the sole remaining defender. And Scat Parsons, hanging close to the sideline, carried it across for a touchdown. It was State, 20: Thorpe, 15.

They missed the try for point, but that was the way it ended. Danny, however, was not too happy about it. Here was a play that they had been holding in reserve. A play that they'd practiced hour upon end, knowing that in the clutch it was good for a touchdown. They'd need it against Tech, but it wouldn't work. And that was what burned him.

As the team funneled into the ramp to go to the showers, Danny saw a bullet head and Mongolian eyes bobbing along in front of him. Lippy was talking to the Thorpe coach.

Lippy looked up, recognized Danny. His eyes were narrowed and there was a look of new respect in them. "How's tricks?" Lippy asked easily.

"Not too bad," Danny muttered.

The Thorpe coach said, "Nice game, Bannion. By the way, a phone call came through to my office for you during the half. But it was too late to get you. The guy said to have you call back and that it was plenty important. He seemed to think you'd know who he was."

Danny felt his face crimsoning, felt his temples begin to throb. "Yeah . . . I know who it was. Where can I get to a telephone?" He was aware that Lippy was studying him closely, interested in what was going on around him.

The Thorpe coach said, "I'll unlock my office for you. Come on—it's just up the line a bit."

Danny was annoyed, the way Lippy continued to cling close to both of them. Lippy was chewing the fat with the Thorpe coach, making small talk. He was still there when they reached a small door, when the coach twisted a key in the lock and opened it.

THERE was a small office with a desk and a telephone and to the rear, a door was open, revealing a larger office inside. The coach said, "Better use the phone in the inner office. There isn't so much noise in there."

Danny said, "Much obliged."

"Just snap the door shut when you get through," the coach said. "I've got to go down and try to console the boys."

Lippy started to drift away. "Well, I'll be seeing you Thanksgiving," Lippy said.

Danny went through the small office and into the larger one and closed the door. It took but a moment to get the call through to Emery Bayliss. And from the tremor in Emery's voice, Danny knew that all hell was breaking loose around his ears.

"The letter came back," Emery said. "And the President was furious. This time, he stood over me while he watched me type the correct address. Then he took the letter and put it into the mail box himself."

Danny groaned. "It'll be delivered in New York by Monday morning . . ."

"Yes," Emery said miserably, "and

if I know anything about Thomas Allison's temper, President Stevens will know by sometime Monday morning that Rex Mallory impersonated him. The Prexy will put two and two together, Danny. He knows about you and Carole and he knows that Rex Mallory was a great actor. What're you going to do, Danny?"

Grimly, Danny said, "Rex Mallory pulled that little impersonation in an effort to save football for State. But a lot is involved for Rex, too. If Thomas Allison blows a gasket, Rex is going to lose his concession rights at the Stadium and right when he's beginning to make some money. So I'm going to go to bat with Thomas Allison. I'm going to make an appointment to see him. Thanks for the tip, Emery"

Danny flashed the receiver and asked for long distance. The operator said, "Will you hang up, please, and place your call again?"

Danny hung up. But an instant later, the phone rang. He lifted it. "Sorry to buzz in your ear, but I couldn't get you to answer. Were you dreaming? I asked you to hang up..."

Puzzled, Danny said, "But I did hang up..."

"Oh, no you didn't. The circuit was open..."

Danny Bannion felt, at that moment, as if the walls were pressing in around him. He remembered the telephone in the other room. *He knew, now, that if it was an extension, the wire would be open, even though he had hung up himself.*

He made a dive for the door. A pair of upturned eyes were staring at him from out of a bullet shaped head. Lippy Lucas had a sickly grin on his face.

"I... I guess that these phones are connected. I was trying to call a dame I know..."

Danny had been suffering too much emotional turmoil and for too long. The sight of Lippy sitting there with the phone in his hand was more than his nervous system could stand. Danny's mind cracked and he was a man gone berserk.

He leaped across the room, reached down and grabbed Lippy by the coat. With his left hand he drew Lippy closer and with his right hand he smashed Lippy in the face.

The sight of Lippy plunging backward from the chair, the sound of Lippy's head smashing the floor, was a combination that cut soberingly into Danny's rage. He stood there, trembling, as Lippy slowly shook his head, then climbed to his feet.

Lippy's mouth was a mess and he made no move to wipe the blood away. Through battered lips, the ex-State coach said, "Bannion, I'm gonna make you regret this day for the rest of your life!"

Then, without another word, Lippy swung his deadly eyes away from Danny and walked through the door. How much did Lippy know? How long had he been listening? These were two questions that Danny was afraid to answer.

Wearily, he picked up the receiver. A few moments later, he learned that Thomas Allison was out of the city for a few days, that he could not be reached before the following weekend.

Danny might have been happy about that report. If Allison was gone, he certainly wouldn't get that letter mentioning his former visit to Prexy Stevens' office, before the game with Tech. But Danny wasn't happy.

Lippy Lucas, who never missed a bet, had horned in on Danny's phone call. And if Lippy had heard just half as much as Danny Bannion feared, then Lippy Lucas was in possession of dynamite!

CHAPTER X

Get Off The Team!

BY Wednesday noon, Danny Bannion was a man gone out of his mind. Everything had been peaceful. And that was what worried him. He felt that the past few days had been but the lull before the storm.

Danny was right . . .

He was eating a beef sandwich in the back end of the Sweet Shoppe when Emery Bayliss found him. Emery's cheeks were more gaunt than usual. He looked as if he hadn't been sleeping.

Emery looked first at Danny, then at Carole, at Rex Mallory. Danny understood the significance of Emery's glance and suddenly he knew that the time had come for him to share the burden.

He drew Carole aside, watched her cheeks turn chalky as he explained what had been happening. Then a stubborn look came into the girl's eyes.

"Dad," she said, "You may as well hear this, too, because it concerns you. All right, Emery. You can talk in front of all of us. You can tell Dad the whole story."

For an instant, Danny's heart went out to the girl. She had watched her father regain his interest in life. She believed that he was a man, again, capable of standing on his own two feet, capable of facing any crisis. Yet she was gambling. Gambling that a sudden upheaval in the easy tenor of his living would not undo all the good that had been done. This, then, was the test.

Quickly, Emery explained to Rex Mallory all that had happened. Then, nervously, he said, "The President's letter has already reached Thomas Allison . . ."

Stunned, Danny said, "That can't be. I tried once again to reach Allison by phone this morning. But he's out of the city and won't be back until the week-end."

Emery's eyes were puzzled. "I'm sure that Allison must know about it. Because his attorney came to the office this morning and asked me a lot of questions . . ."

"His attorney!" Danny shrieked.

"He . . . he seemed to believe that Thomas Allison might want to prosecute someone. He was very rough with me. He made me begin at the beginning and tell him everything. Naturally, I had to."

Danny's breath was coming hard. "Emery—after he left you, did he talk to President Stevens?"

"Why . . . no. He didn't. He just climbed into his car and went away."

Danny's face was like white marble. "If it had *really* been Allison's attorney, he'd have talked with Stevens. Emery, you've been taken. There's been another impersonation. And this time, I think the man behind it is a certain Lippy Lucas. Lippy heard me talking to you the other day, but he didn't get the complete story. So he sent a man down to scare you into talking — probably a private dick. Now Lippy has the whole story, unless I'm mistaken . . ."

"What'll he do?" Carole asked, her eyes darkly frightened.

"Leave it to Lippy," Danny muttered. "He'll think of something . . ."

A man came in through the doorway at that moment. It was Lippy Lucas. His mouth still bore scars of Danny's knuckles. Lippy's beady eyes were triumphant.

"I want to talk to you, Bannion. Alone."

With a sinking feeling, Danny Bannion took Lippy through the door and into the front part of the building. He was ready for anything. And it wasn't long in coming.

Lippy said, "I've got you in the palm of my hand." His voice was rising. It was now a hysterical scream. "I can ruin Carole's old man and maybe I could send you along with him. All I've got to do is pick up a phone and give Prexy Stevens an anonymous tip that it was Mallory, not Allison, who visited his office. The moment that happens, Stevens will blow the lid off. Think about it a minute Bannion. Your friend Rex loses his concession rights. You'll probably get kicked out of school for knowing about it and covering it up. Now do you want me to make the call, or don't you?"

ONCE again, Danny Bannion felt a compelling urge to bury his knuckles in Lippy's face. Yet he knew that he dare not. Lippy Lucas was holding all the trumps.

Huskily, Danny said, "What do you want of me, Lippy?"

The man's eyes had a fanatical gleam and once again his voice grew shrill. "You kept me from coaching a Rose Bowl team once. It would have meant publicity, a big job with the pros. Now, I'm only a backfield coach—but if my team wins tomorrow, I can still get my share of the glory. I'm after just one thing, Bannion, and that's big, blue chips. I'll do anything to get them!"

"Such as?" Danny asked softly.

"You're the sparkplug of the State team! Without you, State is sunk tomorrow. So I'm asking just one thing: Get out of the lineup. Tell 'em you're sick or that you're crippled. But get off the team. If you do, I promise I'll never say anything to anybody!"

Before Danny could say anything, the door burst open and Carole Mallory came rushing in. Her black eyes were venomous. Danny knew that through the thin partition, Carole had heard everything.

"Don't agree to anything, Danny.

No matter what happens, you belong with the team!" Then, to Lippy, "Get out!"

Lippy's expression was bleak. "I'd think it over if I were you. Unless I see something in the evening papers about Bannion not playing, a certain guy named Stevens is going to get a phone call!"

Long after Lippy had gone, Carole and Danny sat talking. Forgotten were Danny's afternoon classes. It was not until the footballers began to troop into their new living quarters that Danny realized how late it had become.

The telephone rang. Danny picked it up. It was Emery Bayliss, speaking in the tones of an undertaker. "Danny . . . j-just a minute."

Another voice said, "Bannion? This is President Stevens."

"Yes sir," Danny said.

"I've just had a very revealing phone call. I want the truth from you. Did you know that a Mr. Mallory came into my office and impersonated himself as Thomas Allison, whom I've never seen?"

Danny's world was toppling out from under him. Dazedly, he said, "Yes, sir. I did. But . . ."

Now, sternly, President Stevens said, "Then I must inform you that you are suspended from Law School until further notice."

"But the game," Danny cried. "They need me . . ."

"You've been laughing behind my back, Bannion. You've made a complete fool of me once. If I allowed you to play, I'd never be able to answer to my conscience . . ."

Danny was getting sore. "Listen," he shouted, "if you suspend me now for as flimsy a reason as that, you will be a laughingstock! Use your head . . ."

That was the wrong thing for Danny to say. The receiver clicked in his

ear and when he tried to call back, the phone did not answer.

Danny looked at Carole. "I'm suspended," he said bitterly.

There were tears in her eyes as they went into the back room. Rex Mallory was not there. Carole looked around, discovered that he had changed his clothes. She made another discovery. Most of their available money was gone.

"He took almost five hundred dollars," Carole said breathlessly. "We were going to use it to break big bills at the game tomorrow."

"I . . . I wonder where he's gone?" Danny asked. Then, he said the thing that was on his mind. "Maybe it was too much for him, Carole. Maybe he's running away from himself again, afraid to face the music."

For a long time, Carole just stood there, watching Danny. Her eyes were brimming, her chin quivering. She took a deep breath, said, "I . . . oh, Danny, I don't know what to think."

He went over to the girl, took her in his arms. He lifted her chin and kissed her. "Keep your chin up, baby." His voice was husky with emotion. "I've got a feeling about Rex. I think he's still with us."

"I hope so, Danny. Oh, I hope so," the girl said.

CHAPTER XI

Two Minutes To Go

DANNY BANNION sat on the edge of his rumpled bed in his room in the Phi House. It was Thanksgiving afternoon. A piece of turkey leg lay in his stomach like a cold lump. What, he wondered, did he have to be thankful for?

Danny leaned over, flipped on the

radio again. He hadn't even gone to the Stadium. He couldn't have found the courage to sit in the stands and watch his mates take their pounding. Instead, he had stayed here, alone.

The radio warmed up and the announcer's voice cut through to him, "*. . . and there, ladies and gentlemen, is the end of another courageous goal line stand by these inspired Staters. That's the fourth time this first half that they've turned back the powerful Tech attack. But for their courage, State might be trailing Tech by six touchdowns instead of by only two. State is in kick formation, now. There goes Hunchy Horton's kick. It's a beauty . . . yes, it's going out of bounds on the midfield stripe. Tech is taking over, now, leading by a 13 to 0 count . . . the clock says just two minutes . . .*"

Danny swore, started to flip the switch. Then something stopped him. The announcer was saying, "*State could use Danny Bannion out there. Just why he's absent, nobody can discover. To every question, Bing Dawson utters a grim, 'No comment!'*"

Now, Danny did flip it off. He lay back on his bunk, closed his eyes. It may have been one minute later. It may have been ten. He knew, only, that he heard the sound of motorcycle sirens. He got up, went to the window. A big, black car pulled up to the curb and the three-motorcycle escort parked alongside it. A man leaped out and ran up the Phi House steps. The man was John Hildebrand.

Danny heard the big attorney's heavy footsteps upon the stairs, then the door burst open. John Hildebrand said, "Get going! We can still make it back to the Stadium for the second half!"

Danny blinked, then Hildebrand had him by the arm and they were hurrying downstairs. In the back seat of the car, Danny saw a grinning Rex Mallory. Beside him was a man with

a little red beard. Danny was getting dizzy.

Rex Mallory said, "I tried to get back sooner, Danny . . ."

The man with the beard, Thomas Allison, wiped the perspiration off his forehead. "If we'd come back any faster," he said quaveringly, "we'd have piled that plane into a mountain."

The car was pulling away from the curb and the sirens were screaming again. Danny said, "Why doesn't somebody tell me what's going on?"

Rex Mallory said, "Allison, here, once backed some of my plays. We used to spend some time in a little hideaway cabin of his up in the mountains. I knew I had to find him and fast . . ."

"So he came to me for help," John Hildebrand said, grinning. "He knew I had a private plane."

"And they kidnapped me, young man!" Thomas Allison muttered. "I told them I had no time to see a football game. Hate the stuff. I—I . . ."

"Now, Tom," Rex Mallory said, "You didn't act like you hated it when you were listening to the first period while we were riding in from the airport."

Suddenly, Thomas Allison grinned. "Young man, do you think you can do something for State? I've given more than a million dollars to this place and it's about time they went to that Geranium Bowl . . ."

"Rose Bowl," John Hildebrand said.

Bewildered, Danny said, "The Prexy suspended me . . ."

"We've talked to him," Thomas Allison said grimly. "And if he knows what's good for State's bank book, he'll quit insisting that I didn't visit him a few weeks ago. You've been reinstated, young man."

Now, for the first time, Danny saw a twinkle in the old man's eyes. Thomas Allison was having the time

of his life. Thanks to Rex and John Hildebrand, the old man had seen the humor in the situation.

Danny said, "This cuts the feet out from under Lippy Lucas. He hasn't anything to hold over me. But I'm afraid it might be too late."

Hildebrand shot Danny a withering look. "What the hell kind of quarter-back are you, anyway?" he demanded.

"We'll see," Danny said. "Brother, but won't we see!"

They had reached the Stadium, now. As Danny leaped out, he could hear the band playing the State Song. He knew that the halftime entertainment was still going on.

He raced down to the dressing room. The varsity was just getting ready to go out. They took one look at Danny and began to pound him on the back, but he tore away from them.

"How long can you delay the start of the second half?" he demanded, peeling off his shirt.

"They're tough officials," Bing said. "They like to start on time. But maybe something will come up. . . ."

"I can break a shoestring," Sam Caddo said.

"And after that," Skinny Parker muttered, "I can faint."

Danny grinned. "Good boys," he said.

He dressed as fast as he could. John Hildebrand had come in to help him. As Danny tied his shoes, he was conscious that the attorney was watching him.

"I'm a stubborn cuss," Hildebrand admitted. "And I hate to say I've been wrong. But dammit, Danny, I've made it a lot tougher for you than I should have. I'm sorry."

Danny felt warm inside. "Forget it," he said. He tucked his helmet under his arm and went clomping through the door and down the long, dark ramp beneath the stadium.

He went through an intersection where two aisles met and a girl's

voice came to him through the distant clamor. "Danny . . . aren't you forgetting something?"

It was his girl, calling out to him. She came out of the shadows, her dark eyes rapturous, arms held out toward him. He reached out to her, drew her close to him, kissed her. "That'll hold me until I have more time," he said. "Thanks, baby . . ."

WHEN he reached the field, the crowd was howling and two angry-faced officials were trying to decide what would happen next. State's players had been stricken with acute fainting spells. Three of them were down, flat on their backs. Two more were crouched low, clumsily tying broken shoe strings. And over on the Tech bench, an irate coaching staff was screaming for them to quit stalling.

Danny's appearance was like the wave of magic wand. The fainting spells passed over. Shoestrings gave no more trouble. The grinning States went back into position. They were ready.

The green jersied Tech team swept downfield like the blade of a mowing machine from the instant the ball left their kicker's toe. Danny watched the ball spinning end over end, watched Hunchy Horton get under it. He loped out in front of his fullback and the first man to break through was his target.

Hunchy kept going, head down, knees pumping. Scat Parsons took out two men and Nick Riley took out another. Hunchy hit the thirty yard stripe before they throttled him.

Danny helped Hunchy to his feet and began to bark signals. The ball came to him in the T. He whirled and slammed it into Hunchy's middle. The big boy with the tapering shoulders went into the line like a log rolling downhill. He split the Tech wall, pow-

ered through it. He went for seven big ones.

Grinning, Danny began calling the play again. As Hunchy swept by, Danny shoved the ball toward him. Hunchy plowed into the strong side, but he didn't have the ball. Danny had held it and now he followed Sam Caddo through the weak side.

Danny burst out in the open, blazed through the Tech secondary before they saw the deception. Sam Caddo knocked the roving fullback spinning and Danny angled over to the sideline.

He was opening up, now, pulling all the stops. He outran a Tech halfback, threw a violent stiffarm into another. Now, but a single man stood between him and a touchdown. The Tech safety.

Danny ran straight for the man's outstretched arms. He feinted right and the arms swung with him. Immediately, Danny started the swing to the left. But he kept going right, for as the safety man followed his second feint, Danny hit him from the side, threw him off balance. A clawing hand groped frantically, found Danny's ankle. But he kicked hard, shook his hips and threw it off and the yard stripes began to slide by beneath him until there were no more.

It was a touchdown. Less than sixty seconds later, Danny swung his expert toe into the ball and it lifted high above the groaning pile of players, settled between the uprights. It was Tech, 13; State 7.

Walking back into position, Danny was close to the State rooting section. The crowd had gone wild. But the wildest segment of that crowd was in a box near the fifty yard line. There, a little man in a red beard, who had never liked football, dammit, was standing up and shouting his lungs out while he hammered a very disturbed Prexy Stevens over the head with a State football pennant.

Danny Bannion had the feeling that

the turning point had come. But he did not take into consideration the fact that Tech had kept her powder dry all during the first half.

The moment Tech got possession on the kickoff, they began to roll. They used a fancy assortment of flashy deception, a combination of straight plays and complicated spinners. They were a Lippy Lucas-coached backfield and they were trained to perfection.

The gains weren't spectacular, but they were consistent. Four yards, three yards, five yards. Sometimes only two yards, but always enough to move the chain upfield for a first and ten.

SLOWLY, inexorably, Danny's team was hammered back. He called time, thinking it might help. But it didn't. Tech kept rolling. Down to the State thirty, the twenty.

And there, finally, State braced, held. Three times in a row, Hoot Ormond and Albie Dale smashed through to bring down the Tech ball carrier. And now it was fourth and nine and Tech was dropping back to try a place kick.

Danny felt helpless, standing there in his safety position. He prayed a little as the lines smashed together. He saw the ball leave the kicker's toe, saw Hoot Ormond's hand go up. The ball was deflected and Danny began to breathe again as it skittered harmlessly over the goal line.

They put the ball in play on their own twenty. Carefully, using straight ground plays, Danny worked it up to midfield. But there Tech rose up to stop them and he was forced to drop back to kick.

And that was the way it went. All through the third quarter, through ten minutes of the fourth. Neither team could score. In midfield, each club was powerful on offense. But with the chips down, near the goal line, they could not penetrate.

Danny was watching the clock. Less than five minutes. Tech had the ball in midfield and Tech was stalling, nibbling away at the remaining time.

Danny stayed up close, yelling at his mates, urging them to get in and break it up. State tried. But Tech kept picking up yardage. It was four minutes, then three. Tech was down to State's thirty, now.

It was Hoot Ormond who broke it up. Hoot fought his way into the Tech backfield, powered his body into the path of the Tech full back. The man went down, pole-axed and the ball dropped from his hands. Hoot reached out, gathered it in. He was grinning when the avalanche of green jerseys fell on him.

Danny glanced at the clock. Two minutes and a half. Then he looked at his men. They were tired and they were battered. They had played themselves a ball game. They had come this far together, a team that refused to be beaten, no matter how great the odds against them. Danny wondered, grimly, if they had come this close, only to have victory denied them. Not, he decided, if he could help it.

An idea was gnawing away at Danny's mind, but he shoved it rudely aside, afraid of it. He began to bark signals. The ball came back and he gave it to Hunchy. The big fullback carried half the Tech line with him for five big ones.

Danny tried a sneak that picked up three. Then Scat Parsons skirted the end for seven. They were picking them up, but not fast enough and Danny knew it. The clock had come around to little more than a minute.

Again the idea gnawed at Danny. Again he put it aside as too dangerous. Instead, he called for a pass. But Tech was expecting it and even though it was completed, they nailed Skinny after he'd gained but ten more yards.

They were near midfield and when

the idea again came to Danny, he shrugged his shoulders and fought it no longer. He called a huddle and he told them. And when he finished, he said, "What do you guys think about it?"

"You're our quarterback," Hoot said. "We'll string along with you. You'll get your blocking."

So, once again, he set it up, his heart hammering heavily in the base of his throat. Danny got the ball. Hunchy went past him and Danny followed him into the line. They exploded through. Off to the left, Nick Riley was running. Danny underhanded the lateral to Nick and Nick went for the left sideline, sucking the Tech defense over with him. At the sideline, Nick whirled and threw a pass the full width of the field and there was Scat Parsons, waiting.

IT was the same play that had won the Thorpe game with Lippy Lucas in the stands, watching. And it was working as well. Danny went straight downfield, cut down the Tech safety man. Hunchy Horton took out the defensive left half. And Scat Parsons, a foot inside the sideline, raced over for a touchdown!

The crowd went mad. Then silence fell as the two 13s were posted beside each other on the board. Danny didn't have to ask for blocking. This time, he got it. His entire forward wall charged straight ahead as a single man. They bowled Tech tacklers cleanly out of the path of the play.

And Danny Bannion, taking his time, swung his big right leg with the easy motion of a ticking metronome. The ball began to lift and for a moment it hung against the sky, then it was dropping into the crowd beyond the goal posts and the officials were pointing their arms heavenward. It was State, 14; Tech, 13.

And thirty seconds later, State was being carried off the field by a victory-

mad crowd, the first leg of their long journey to the Rose Bowl . . .

The head coach at Tech was a decent guy. He came up and shook Danny's hand. He said, "That touchdown play was a lulu. That was the one that sunk us. Too bad you didn't use it in front of one of our scouts. . ."

Danny saw Lippy Lucas, trying to slink away. Danny said, pointedly, "As a matter of fact, we used it last week against Thorpe. But for some reason, Lippy must have had the idea that I wouldn't be here today, that we wouldn't use it."

The coach's face went stony. "You mean. . ."

"Ask Lippy," Danny said, and then he began to move away again, knowing that Lippy Lucas, for once, had been too smart for himself. Lippy was going to have to start his career at the bottom again. . .

That night, it was open house at the Phi House. Everyone who knew anyone among the Phi's was there. Even Prexy Stevens was there and for the thousandth time, a suddenly football-minded little man with a red beard was telling him what it would mean to State to have a team in the Tulip Bowl.

Danny shook his head, grinned. He had given up.

"Another thing," Thomas Allison said, "what State needs is a bigger Dramatics department. Now for half a million dollars. . . ." The red beard swung toward Prexy Stevens again. "It's a shame for a man with Rex Mallory's talents to be selling hot dogs. He should be teaching dramatics for State. . ."

Prexy Stevens looked as if he had swallowed a pin-cushion.

"You've got to admit," Thomas Allison said, "that he's a pretty good actor. . ."

Suddenly, Prexy Stevens grinned. A bit sheepishly, but nevertheless, it was a grin. He went over, clapped

Rex Mallory on the back, held out his hand to him. "Let's call it a deal, Mallory. Let's forget the past and start over again."

Danny saw the look in Rex Mallory's eyes and he didn't think he could stand it any longer. Rex Mallory was no longer living in the past, but in the future. Carole came alongside him and tugged at his arm.

"You said you had something to take care of when you had a little

time," she reminded him.

Grinning, he took her out onto the porch, started to fold his big arms around her. The door opened and it was John Hildebrand.

Danny said, "Beat it."

Hildebrand grinned, closed the door. "Okay, partner," he said.

"Now," Danny said, looking down at the girl.

Her eyes were darkly luminous. "Okay, partner," she said.

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ELECTROLUSCIOUS ENTERTAINMENT

WHEN A HOOP MARVEL TURNS FIGHTER—FAST ACTION NOVELET!

BLOODY BASKETS

By ROE RICHMOND

Author of "Feed 'Em That Fireball," etc.



Koska had the ball now as he spun away from the guard!

The boy could drill the leather through the twines from any angle just like his court-famous father, he could dribble and block and pass with basketball's best. All the boy was lacking was his court-famous father's guts. . . .

THE TOWN looked the same, only worse Mike saw at once. The lights about the Square shone on snowy emptiness. There

were a few lighted windows, a few cars, one store still open, and no other sign of life. It was a ghost town in the northern night.

"What a waste of electricity," muttered the driver of the big New York car. "What them lights for anyway, snowbirds?"

"People live here," Mike said. "I don't know why. Tonight they're all at the basketball game. Let me out here, Flick."

"You ain't stopping *here*, Chief?" protested Flicker. "We ain't that hot we got to hole out in this graveyard."

"I'm going to the game," said Mike. "You can come or you can wait around. There's a beer joint up the street."

"I'll take the beer, Chief. If I waste any time on basketball it'll be in the Garden."

"They play basketball up here in the woods," Mike told him. "Real basketball, too."

"I'll take your word for it, Chief. I'll be in the tavern. Don't get lost in the crowd."

The man called Chief got out of the car and walked past the Square with its bandstand and Civil War cannon, and went on past the grocery store, and the drugstore, the jewelry shop, and the haberdashery that he remembered, and on down a street as desolate as a deserted stage set.

Funny, he thought, it's just the same after all this time only it seems smaller and shabbier and meaner. Same signs on the stores. There was the library, the Methodist Church, and brick schoolhouse dark against the frosty stars. Yes, they still played in the old gymnasium, a barnlike structure with lights ablaze. All the memories came back, catching at his throat, quickening his blood, chilling his spine. Twenty years ago. . . . Once again he was seventeen, tramping eagerly toward the gym and the games that meant so much. He laughed softly to himself.

At the swarming entrance the old excitement gripped him hard and he hesitated, half-afraid. But nobody

would recognize him, of course. He bought a ticket and took his seat in the gallery. People stared at this stranger with the dark scarred face and the city clothes. The teams were warming up, filling the brightness with basketballs, and the players looked very young and clean and fit.

In the crowd Mike picked out half-forgotten faces. An old schoolteacher, two ageing doctors, the same dentist and lawyer, the postmaster, the drug-gist, and a banker. Still buried here, he thought, and shook his head. His cold eyes slanted back to the hardwood court, the set young faces and the close-cropped heads. The home team still wore gold-and-blue, but what a difference from the clumsy padded equipment that Mike remembered. Now the golden shorts were shiny satin and the blue jerseys were lettered and numbered in gold. They looked good.

A squad of girls in blue sweaters and yellow skirts came out and led the cheers in college style. Band music blared out from beneath the gallery. Yes, there had been changes. Mike's throat tightened and there was a hollow fluttering in his stomach. As if he were down there himself waiting for it to start.

And then Mike saw him. He stiffened at the shock and stared with disbelief. A violent shiver went through him. The lights blurred and wavered before his eyes. His fists tightened until his forearms ached numbly. It couldn't be true, he must be crazy, it couldn't be possible. . . . But even then he knew it was.

The boy was tall and straight and clean in his uniform with a dark cropped head and a sharp profile. He moved nicely, easily, with smooth speed and grace, handling himself and the ball with assurance, throwing shots from all angles and positions that slid fairly into the netting. Mike felt old and sick and spent. It was like

watching himself twenty years back. Mike rubbed his eyes and turned to the man beside him.

"Who's that Number Seven?"

"That's Mickey Koska and he's good, you want to watch him."

"I will, I'll watch him, he looks good."

"He's the best we got."

"He ain't as good as his old man was though," somebody put in.

"Aw, he's better," argued another.

"His old man was a bum."

"Maybe, but he could play ball, mister, and don't forget it."

"I never saw his old man," said Mike's neighbor. "But this kid is all right."

Mike said: "Will he be going to college?"

"Naw, there's no money."

IT was almost game-time. Mike breathed with difficulty and his palms were damp. He searched the crowd for another face now, but did not find it. He cursed himself for coming, then told himself he wouldn't have missed it for anything. He leaned forward, elbows on knees, and waited. He felt alive, painfully alive, for the first time in a long while.

The band played *Bristol Forever*, and Mike started to stand up with the students and alumni, but remembered in time to hold his seat. With narrowed gaze he scanned row after row of faces but failed to find the one he sought. He settled back somehow relieved. That would have been too much. The sad sweet strains of the music died a haunting death. The officials were on the floor and the teams formed compact clumps of color on either side of the court, one gold-and-blue, the other red-and-white.

They scattered to their positions, shook hands briefly, and stood crouched and poised for action. Mike saw only Number Seven, lithe and easy in the center circle. The ball

went up from the referee's hands, and Mickey Koska tapped it to a teammate. The home team broke fast, snapping the ball from man to man, faking and pivoting and passing. Basketball had improved all right, they played a better game.

Mickey Koska had the ball deep in the corner. Spinning away from a red shirt he faked a shot and drilled a pass to a teammate cutting through. The boy laid it up there but it circled the hoop and dropped outside. "Shoulda shot yourself, Mick," Mike was muttering, when Mickey Koska came slicing through, hurtled high in the air, and slapped the ball back into the meshes. A deafening roar filled the gymnasium, and Mike thrilled to the sound. "Attaboy, attakid," Mike said softly. "You show 'em, Mickey boy."

The big red team brought the ball back rapidly. They looked stronger and older and tougher than the local five. Newton always had rough rugged teams, bigger than Bristol. Mike recalled the fury and strife of games twenty years ago, the fist fights and brawls and riots that broke out whenever Newton and Bristol met.

Newton carried the ball through, blocking and screening effectively, using their weight and power. Mickey Koska was blotted out of the play by his opponent, a hulking ugly-faced boy named Greer. The first try missed but Greer shouldered Mickey aside, bulled through and rammed the rebound home. "Don't let him do that, Mickey," Mike said through his teeth. "Fight back, kid, fight back. If he wants that stuff give it to him."

Bristol moved slower this time, feeling their way, trying to pull the defensive players out. When the thrust came it was like lightning. Mickey Koska was in the scoring slot but Greer smashed and grappled him. There were cries of "Foul!" but no foul was called. Jump ball. Greer

threw his hip into Mickey as they went up, and Newton secured the ball. A quick break-through and Newton scored from the side to lead, 4-2.

Mike was swearing quietly to himself. "Mickey, what's the matter? Go after that guy, Mick. Don't let him push you around." Players like Greer, big, tough and dumb, had been Mike's dish in the old days. Mike had taken it and he had handed it out.

NOW he noticed some of the other Bristol players. Two of them, obviously brothers, looked familiar and he groped back for the name, the name of the two brothers who had played with him. Lewis, that was it. There were always Lewises on Bristol teams, natural athletes, and these two kids were unmistakably Lewises. They were good, too, as Huck and Slug Lewis had been two decades before. Mike grinned as one Lewis, roughed by an adversary, used shoulder, elbow and hip on the fellow at the first opportunity.

Must be Huck's kid, mused Mike. Old Huck used to put the blast on 'em that way only harder. Mickey, that's what you got to do, you got to hand it back to 'em, boy.

One of the Lewis boys knifed through to ring in the tying goal. There were fouls called and both sides added free throws. Mickey Koska couldn't seem to get going. Big Greer was on top of him every second, fouling constantly and getting away with it. Mike lost track of the score, fretting and squirming in his seat because Mickey wouldn't cut loose — or couldn't. At the first quarter Newton led, 12-9.

Mike looked over the spectators again with no results. He was worried about Mickey. Something was wrong with the boy. He had everything but spirit apparently. There must be a soft streak in him somewhere. Maybe his mother spoiled and babied him.

Maybe it came from growing up with a woman—and no father.

Around him the fans were talking. "Koska smells tonight." "He's scared of that Greer, he can't take it." "He never did like the rough stuff much." "Oh, Mickey'll get going, don't you worry." "Look at Pearson, he ain't done a thing yet." "Pearson and Mickey both had too much mothering, if you ask me."

"Pearson," Mike repeated to himself. "Pearson . . ." That name struck a chord in his memory. Sure, Pep Pearson, that was it. He had been older, he was in college when Mike was here. Pearson came home on holidays, handsome, blond, well-dressed, and worldly. His folks had money and Pearson drove his own car. He had liked Angela, too, and taken her out a few times until Mike laid down the law. "If you want him you can have him, but if you want me he's out and everybody else is out, see?" And poor Angela, she'd been a fool, she had said, "I want you, Mike, always." He smiled a bitter unhappy smile.

Returning to the present he picked out the Pearson boy on the floor. He should have noticed the resemblance. Same blond curly hair, fresh handsome face, superior smile. But he had forgotten all about Pearson and his own young jealousy, a long way back. Surprise to find Pearson still living in this forsaken sinkhole. Family must have lost their money.

SECOND QUARTER. Mickey Koska, Pearson, the Lewis brothers, and the fifth player whom Mike couldn't identify, the smallest and youngest-looking kid on the court. He inquired of the man next to him. The kid's name was Grant, which conveyed nothing to Mike. Probably a new family in town. The kid acted scared and Mike felt sorry for him.

Newton started with a rush. Greer crowded through Mickey's zone, and

two red shirts swept in after him with the ball shutting between them. The try bounced back from the board. As Mickey Koska went up after it Greer's elbow caught him in the belly, Greer's bulk hiding the act from the referee. Mickey's mouth came open, his face twisted, and he doubled with pain. Mike felt that jab in his own stomach and swore savagely. A Newton player popped the ball into the hoop. "Hellfire, Mickey, open up on that gorilla, crack down on him, boy," Mike said under his breath.

Play was fast and furious. The ball flew back and forth along the brilliant hardwood, both clubs missing, scrapping for the rebounds, launching new attacks. Finally Mickey Koska swung into the open on the right wing, fainted, dodged away, and threw a right-hander from the sideline. The ball swished sharply through strings. It was pretty all right, but it wasn't what Mike wanted to see. The crowd screamed, but a man near Mike said: "All he can do is shoot." Newton 14-Bristol 11.

Newton spurted and rolled in three more points. The weakness in the Bristol defense was Mickey Koska's zone. Newton shifted and took a crack at little Grant's side, scoring again. Little Grant was down on the floor under big Greer and another red shirt, and they punished him there, but no foul was called. Newton, 19-11.

MICKEY KOSKA seemed to catch fire and flare up at this, and when Bristol attacked Mickey Koska slashed straight past Greer, pivoted round another foeman, and took a running leap to twist in midair and fire the ball into the net. "That's more like it, Mick," breathed Mike. "That's the way to go, kid. Run 'em into the floor now."

The fighting Lewis brothers stopped the Newton assault. Bristol carried back passing beautifully.

Mickey Koska fed the ball to Pearson in close for a step-shot, and it was 19-15. The Lewis who looked like Huck roared through and slammed another into the bucket, bringing Bristol within two points. Mickey Koska swiped the ball away from Greer at midfloor and dribbled down fast, but Greer fouled him brutally from behind and Mickey plunged into a long sliding fall under the backboard.

The referee had to call that one. The crowd boomed. Mickey went to the foul line, limping and shaken with floorburns on both legs, and planted two perfect tosses in the net. A great pride swelled inside Mike as he saw this. The boy had guts enough. It was tied up at 19-all, and the half was nearly over.

But Newton turned on the heat and the power, driving through Koska's position for a quick score. Mike saw Greer use his weight and strength on Mickey, but Mickey didn't come back at him. That referee must be blind. But what the hell, Mickey should be able to take care of himself, shouldn't he? Mickey lacked something all right. The boy was soft.

Newton switched the pressure onto little Grant and scored again, treating Grant harshly. Both Lewis boys started after Greer with ready fists, but they were pulled off and peace was restored. *Where was Mickey Koska?* Why wasn't he in there with his hands up ready to battle? Greer was his man . . . Mike felt hot and sick with shame and disappointment.

Once more Newton tallied before the half ended, charging again through the territory guarded by Mickey Koska to set up a dog-shot under the board. Newton 25 - Bristol 19.

Mike got blindly to his feet, fumbling for cigarettes and following the crowd outside for a smoke. "He's no boy of mine," Mike said fiercely, un-

happily. "He's no son of mine, by God."

Out on the steps cigarette smoke curled into the chill air and wreathed the lights while the fans played over the first half. Mike stood apart listening, hat brim low over his eyes. He wished he could get into the dressing room and take Mickey Koska aside and talk to the kid. Then he realized how absurd and impossible that was. For an instant he thought of leaving now. The smart thing would be to beat it uptown to the tavern, have a few with Flicker, and then jump into the crate and blow out of here fast. But he couldn't do that and he knew it. He had to stay. Mickey needed him, needed somebody, something, to snap him out of it.

EVERYONE was wondering out loud what was wrong with Mickey Koska tonight. Some of the remarks set Mike's teeth on edge and made his knuckles itch. He reviewed Mickey's play. Three goals and three foul points, total of nine, not bad offensively. But on the defense he had been awful, and in midcourt not too good. Worst of all he had taken all that stuff from Greer without a comeback.

"Newton's a dirty team," somebody said. "Look at that Greer." "Well, if our boys are sissies they shouldn't be in there." "Mickey Koska ain't much like his old man was, is he? The old man was tougher'n hell, they say." "That's just the trouble, Mickey's mother has always been afraid he'd be like the old man. She's softened him up, that's all . . ." "Yeah," said another, "and young Pearson's the same way." "Well, he mighta been a lily anyway, but not Mickey. Too much Koska blood in Mickey." "Yeah, I know. He can scrap when he gets started, I seen him go." "Sure, but his old man started in to lick the whole Newton team one night and he

was doing all right till they stopped it. He was hell-on-wheels."

Mike looked at them and grinned behind the smoke of his cigarette. Some he remembered dimly, some were strangers, most of them were old-timers. Why, they had seemed old when he was a boy, and here they were yet. It amused him to picture what would happen if he stepped forward and introduced himself. He sobered abruptly. He himself wasn't important anymore. Mickey was the one.

Second half starting with Bristol trailing by six points. Newton went into high gear and tried to powerhouse Bristol out of the picture, but the Lewis brothers followed the ball like hawks and stemmed the red tide. Bristol went back but could not penetrate the stubborn Newton defense. Another Newton surge led to a basket, and the visitors were out front, 27-19. They had little finesse but lots of driving power and aggressiveness. Newton teams had always been that way. Mike was sweating as if he were in there himself. He had the queer idea that somehow by concentration and strain he could impart some of his own raw, reckless fighting spirit to Mickey Koska.

It appeared to work when Mickey Koska went weaving through to cut the cords with a running toss from behind the foul circle. And Mike was almost sure when Mickey plowed in to break up the Newton return and reverse the direction of the ball. Little Grant took the final pass and slipped the ball into the hemp, but Greer crashed him and piled him up after the shot. Grant was too groggy to make his free try count. Newton 27-Bristol 23. Mickey Koska said something to Greer, and Mike read his lips. "Lay off the little guy." Greer laughed at him. In the gallery Mike laughed quietly. Mickey Koska was beginning to burn.

A brace of foul points restored Newton's six point lead, 29-23. Mickey Koska pivoted the retaliating thrust, whirling and spinning through the Newton defense to rifle a pass in to the blond Pearson. Pearson flipped home an overhead shot to narrow the gap to four points again. The gym was in a continuous insane uproar, the tremendous volume of sound drowning the referee's whistle.

Mickey Koska cut through on the right side and hurled the ball goalward, but Greer spoiled the attempt with a flying body block that knocked Mickey sprawling. The officials caught that one. The Bristol fans booed, and the Newton adherents yelled, "Kill the pansy, Greer, break him apart!" Mickey Koska looked at Greer and said, "Keep it up and you'll get hurt." Greer laughed at him again.

Mickey Koska flicked the twines with two free tosses, and Newton led by a scant two points, 29-27. But Mike was hurt and humiliated. Long before now he himself would have got to Greer one way or another. Others in the crowd were thinking the same thought, and Mike heard their voices.

"If Mickey was like his old man there'd be fists flying." "The old man was quick and handy with his fists, mighty quick." And then it came: "Yeah, but Mickey's mother is here tonight, you know. She never saw him play before. He's playing her way, that's what's the matter."

MIKE sat stricken with paralysis, turned to cold stone with a helpless inner tumult of flame and smoke. "There she is," somebody said, pointing. "Still young and pretty after all she's been through." And then Mike saw her and it all came back, searing and blinding and hurting deep.

Newton scored from the floor and the foul stripe, leading 32-27, but Mike was unaware of it. He was watching Angela. She looked the same,

only lovelier. Her profile was clear, her eyes dark and sad, her brow pure under the brown hair. Incredible that she has changed so little. His first impulse was to go straight to her, but he didn't move, he couldn't do that. He had come as a stranger. He must leave as a stranger. His world was far away from here. And what an empty world it was, he realized all at once. . . Mike turned back to the game.

Mickey Koska gunned a long one from midcourt and the ball zipped through the laces. The Lewis boys broke up the Newton offensive. Mickey Koska raced across under the backboard, grabbed a bullet pass, jumped high, arched backward, and threw the ball back over his head. It glanced from the board into the netting. Mike was surprised to find himself up and howling with the rest of the Bristol rooters. One point now, 32-31.

The kid was a sweet scoring player. All he lacked was fight. Too much mother—and no father, that was the answer. . . Mike winced as Newton drove two rapid-fire scoring plays through Mickey Koska's post, just before the third period ended. Newton 36-Bristol 31.

Mike stood up and moved toward the exit. Angela was downstairs sitting in the bleachers near the door. Mike went down the steps like a sleep-walker. He halted in the hall at the bottom looking from the gym to the outside door. If he was smart he'd take that door and blow out of there. He was supposed to be plenty smart in the Big Town. But something drew him toward the entrance to the playing surface. Then the outer door crashed open and Flicker was there clutching at his arms.

"They're here, Chief, I seen 'em!" panted Flicker.

Mike's face drew into cruel lines, then slowly relaxed. "Who is it, Vito?"

"Yeah, Vito and the Joker, up in that beer joint right now."

"They must want to see us pretty bad," Mike mused. "They see you, Flick? They must've seen the car."

"They're sitting there watching the car. I ducked out the side door. They musta been on our tail all the time. What's to do, Chief? We could rub 'em both out and take a quick powder."

Mike shook his head. "Gimme time. Flick, gimme time."

"Best chance we'll ever get to bump 'em," Flicker said. "Way up here in the sticks. Just like clay pigeons. Come on, Chief."

INSIDE the game was on again with the crowd raising a steady roar. Mike's brain raced but got nowhere. "What a break," he kept muttering, "what a lousy rotten break." Suddenly the sound of cheering changed to a long-drawn gasp, pierced by the whistle. Mike went over and grabbed a fellow in the doorway.

"What happened in there?"

"Koska, Mickey Koska got hurt."

Mike turned back to Flicker his face drawn blank. He looked at his watch. "Flick, there's a New York train out of here in fifteen minutes. You jump it, see? Tell the boys I'll be down later."

Flicker gaped at him. "Chief, are you screwloose? You must be nutsy cuckoo. What the —?"

"Do like I said, Flick. Have you got enough coin?"

"It ain't the coin I'm worrying about, it's you. You and them two gorillas, Chief. What kind of a dilly you think I am?"

"I know you, Flick, and you know me. We get along. But I'm the boss, boy. Papa knows best. Don't miss your train, pal."

Flicker shook his head. "Okay, Chief. I thought I knew all the angles but you got my ears pinned back this

time. What's this town got for you?"

"I don't know—yet," Mike said gravely. "But don't worry about our two playmates, Flick. Just go climb on that club car and drink your way home." Flicker went still shaking his head.

Mike was pushing his way into the jammed entrance when he met her coming out. Her head was down and she was crying. He stood in front of her and said her name. Angela looked up without recognition at first. Then an incredulous fear froze her wet face as she stared up at him. Then she smiled and it was the brightest thing Mike had ever seen, and the most hurting. He led her away from the confusion.

"Is the kid hurt bad, Angel?"

"No, I guess not. Oh, Mike, Mike, this is too—Mike, I don't know . . ."

"Take it easy, Angel, take it easy. He's okay, don't worry. Tough like his old man. Remember how you waited here for me one night when I got mugged up?"

"He's not tough like you, Mike."

"Aren't you glad? You ought to be. But the kid's all right, he could be tough—if you'd let him. I wish I—but it's kind of late for that. You got to tell him to cut loose and hit back."

"I will, I will, I didn't understand—until tonight. Mike, how did you know, what are you doing here?" But before he could tell her he hadn't known at all, Mickey Koska came out walking between two boys, his face pale under his short dark hair, and Angela ran to him and Mike moved out of the way.

"I'm all right, just groggy for a minute," Mickey Koska told her. "I'm going right back in. Don't you worry, Mom."

"When you go back," Angela said, "I want you to fight that big fellow, play the way he plays, give as good as you get. Will you, Mickey?"

The boy showed his surprise and

then he laughed aloud. "You mean it, Mom? You really mean it? All right, you watch me go!"

When Angela turned to Mike the big man's eyes were blinking and his throat was working as he crushed her hands in his.

"Sit with me, Mike, there's room," she said simply, and they went in and climbed onto the bleachers. The hall resounded when Mickey Koska returned to the game. Newton 40-Bristol 34, with about five minutes left.

Big Greer spearheaded a thrust into Mickey Koska's zone. Mickey lunged in to meet him, twisted by somehow, and Greer sprawled heavily aside as Mickey snared the ball and passed to one of the Lewis brothers. Going down the floor like lightning Mickey Koska took a return pass, spun away from a guard, and hooked the leather into the meshes.

"Just like his old man—now," Angela said.

Newton advanced again throwing their power at Mickey. Once more Mickey feinted Greer off balance and slashed past him, using elbow and hip as he went by. Both sides missed shots. Bristol swept the court in a fast assault. Mickey Koska broke clear on the right wing, whirled in the air and fired the ball just as Greer hurtled against him. They fell together but Mike saw Mickey's elbow flash twice into Greer's neck, saw the look of pain and surprise on Greer's face. And the ball whipped the twines in passing. They gave Mickey a free try and he flipped that in likewise. Newton by but one point now, 40-39.

THE Newton team began to crack open as the pressure increase, and both Lewis boys plugged the hoop to lift Bristol into the lead, 43-40. Newton fouled so flagrantly that Pearson and Grant toed the foul line and added their points. And Mickey Koska sailed straight through Greer's

position to sling home another, while the home crowd went wild.

Bristol 47-Newton 40, and time was brief.

"It's all over now, Angel," Mike said. "He's a great boy. Now I got a little business to take care of, and then I'll see you if it's all right. You live in the same place?"

"No, the old Pearson house. But Mike, you won't come back, I know you won't."

"Sure I will, Angel. The Pearson house? Some class."

Out on the court big Greer suddenly hurled little Grant to the hardwood floor with brutal force. Mickey Koska reached Greer with one long running leap, yanked him around, and let him have it with both hands. The blows smacked loud. Greer reeled back and floundered on the floor. Players of both teams started swinging, substitutes and spectators charged into it, and the gym was in a tumult.

Mike laughed exultantly and threw his arm round Angela. Then, while order was being restored, he left her quickly and walked out. He hadn't felt so fine in years. Vito and the Joker, huh? Mike laughed softly. He felt like walking right into that beer garden and putting the blast on both of them. But he couldn't do it that way, not here, not now . . .

On the street a stray windblown sentence reached his ears. "Did you see Mrs. Pearson with that stranger . . .?" Mike quickened his steps and caught the man by the arm. "Did Angela Koska marry Pep Pearson?" It didn't sound like his own voice. The man looked scared. "Yeah, she did, but—" Mike strode on blindly into the winter night.

So that's how it was. She hadn't waited long either. That Pearson kid must be almost as old as Mickey, within two years anyhow . . . But why shouldn't she do it? Mike had gone off and left her. Of course he wouldn't

have gone if he'd known about Mickey . . . Why, hadn't she told him, why, why, *why*? It was her fault. No it was his own fault. Hell, they were both to blame. The old Pearson house, huh? So that's the way it ended. Tough though, to find a son and lose him, all in one night.

"Now I might as well take those two monkeys myself," Mike gritted into the teeth of the wind. "I sure feel like it. Walk right in and give it to 'em!" But no, he couldn't do that, something might go wrong. There was Mickey to think about. Mickey Koska, a great kid . . . As the cold bit into him Mike began to feel lonesome.

VITO and the Joker sat at a table where they could watch both doors and the car parked outside. They looked up when five or six hicks clumped in carrying rifles. "Musta been hunting, huh?" the Joker said. "Or maybe they freight that arsenal round all the time up here." The men sat down across the way and ordered beer, keeping their rifles handy. Vito wasn't much of a conversationalist, and the Joker felt like talking.

"What you boys hunting?" he inquired pleasantly.

"Rats," said the biggest of the men.

"Must have pretty powerful rats up in these parts."

"Some are, some just think they are."

"Which kind you like best?"

"Neither, especially the last kind."

The big guy did all the talking. The Joker laughed politely. Vito kicked him under the table. Vito had his arms crossed on the board. The Joker crossed his arms in the same manner so as to reach his shoulder-holster.

The big man said: "You two lay both hands out on the table, you're under arrest."

"What for?" the Joker exploded.

"What kind of backwood comedy is

this? We done anything wrong?"

"Not here—that I know of. They want you in New York. All right, lay out your hands."

Vito turned his dead-pan stare on them for the first time, and some of the men winced almost visibly. The Joker said, "Are you Texas Rangers or Royal Mounties, which?"

"Uncross those arms or we'll shoot!" The big guy was excited.

Vito's cold eyes swept them as he spoke for the first time, quietly: "Listen, you. Before you started using them muskets you'd all be down on the floor, *dead*. Go home and milk the cows."

"Go on, put the cuffs on 'em, boys," commanded the big man, but his voice was shaky. Nobody moved. "Go on!" he yelled. "Put the cuffs on 'em." Still the group stayed motionless.

Vito said: "I'll drop the first guy that moves. And after him the rest of you." Vito felt he had won, there was no longer any danger. These yokels were scared sick.

The front door opened and Mike came in with a gun in his hand and something shiny on his lapel. "Don't do anything rash, sweetheart."

The Joker burst out laughing. "Lookit, on his chest! *Him*, with a sheriff's badge on!"

"Pretty, isn't it," Mike said. "The best part is I can shoot you both and it's lawful. Get your hands up fast or I will."

Their hands came up all right but they had guns in them. Mike fired first and his slug ripped through the Joker's shoulder and knocked him back over his chair. The other deputies scattered kicking over chairs and tables, and one of them struck Mike and staggered him into a half-turn, just as he was throwing down on Vito. Vito said, "You shoulda come alone, Mike," and levelled his automatic, when a gun blazed from the rear entrance. Vito jerked under the impact,

tottered into a slow crazy dance, and his gun went off as he fell face downward. Flicker walked forward from the rear of the room grinning. The Joker squirmed round on the floor to take a shot at Flicker, but the big sheriff finally came to life and brought his rifle-butt crashing down on the Joker's head. It was all over.

Vito and the Joker were both unconscious but neither was dangerously wounded. Mike said: "Get 'em to the hospital, and guard 'em even while they're under ether. They're bad eggs, strictly bad. Someone from New York will be up to get them tomorrow. Keep us two out of it altogether, see? You boys get all the credit, and there's rewards out too."

"Well, thanks," said the big sheriff. "Mighty glad you fellers was here just the same." They went out with the prisoners.

Mike looked at Flicker. "And I'm

mighty glad you missed that train, chum."

"So I'm forgiven?" Flicker said. "So we'll have a drink, Chief."

The bartender was trembling and spilled the drinks. He showed them to a private room where they'd avoid the curious crowd that was gathering, and he said all they could drink was on the house. He also said Mrs. Pearson had been calling up for a man named Mike.

"What about her husband?" Mike asked.

"Oh, he's dead, Pearson is," said the bartender. "Died some years back. And her first husband, I forget his name, he run away a little while after they were married. She's had bad luck with husbands all right."

"Her bad luck's all over," Mike said. "Come on, Flicker, grab an armful of bottles. We're going to a family reunion."

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BRAIN-TRUST IN THE BACKFIELD

By **RICHARD BRISTER**

Author of "All-American Means All-Out," etc.

A WHISTLE SHRILLED. In perfect formation the Seymour varsity charged toward the ball. The kicker's toe thudded into the leather, and it floated end over end down the field.

Jigger West, number two back on the second team, slid behind it, cradled it carefully, and tucked it between his palm and elbow.

A fast-stepping end was down already, diving headlong at him. Jigger wheeled; the clutching hands slithered down his moleskins; he stumbled, wrenched loose and spurted toward the sideline.

The varsity giants were cutting him off, intent on forcing him over the line. Jigger reversed field sharply and turned on the heat.

His cleats chopped the half-frozen turf in a scorching tempo, too much for the lumbering giants to match.

Bobbing, weaving, straight-arming, he swept past the last of his would-be tacklers and went over the goal standing up.

Coach Barney Davis came up on his barrel legs, his square jaw sagging.

"Where'd you get the Red Grange stuff, West?"

Jigger flushed painfully. "Pure luck, Coach. 'Course, I don't get to do much running. I'm number two, and—"

"Ye Gods!" thundered Davis, "I can't read minds. Why didn't you tell me you're a 'ball-toting fool?'"

"What for? I don't mind the blocking position."

The head coach gulped and stared at him queerly. "You mean you'd just as soon block as run the ball?" He sighed weakly, his gray eyes narrow. "Maybe you *were* just lucky. Take

All right, he was a ball-toting fool, a sensational blocker, a terrific tackler; fine, excellent; but football wasn't what the kid had come to college for. . . .

Jigger West hugged the pigskin as he galloped for the touchdown



Lacy's position. I wanta see you tote it again, before I believe it."

Jigger went back to the huddle with quick nervous steps. The varsity linemen didn't scare him; he simply doubted if he could come up to expectations.

He'd done no regular ball-toting since high school. Last year, as a freshman, he had passed up football in favor of studies.

"Hup. Hup!"

Jigger stepped neatly into position, crouched, and the ball spiraled toward him. This was a delayed spinner. His job was to feint the ball to the number two man, then take it himself around right end. But it didn't work out.

The varsity should have been penalized for roughing the second team center, but that line of reasoning couldn't straighten out the wobbly pass that came back at Jigger.

It was a floater, high and far. It veered to his left when the cross wind caught it. He turned his back on the line, churned his legs, and finally yanked it out of the air like a forward pass.

The thumping cleats of Bull Dawson, varsity fullback, were hot behind him. Jigger sprinted straight ahead, toward his own goal. In ten yards the lumbering Dawson was two steps behind.

Jigger spun toward the sideline, gradually rounded the arc toward the varsity goal. Three tacklers came at him at once. He jabbed out his left hand stiffly.

One big man dropped. Jigger bulled through the others with sheer knee-driving power. Then a couple of human behemoths ploughed into him, and he sprawled on the unyielding turf.

Barney Davis came walking out slowly, shaking his head. Jigger said quickly,

"I better stick to blocking, huh, Coach?"

Davis stared at him. "Snap out of it, you dang fool! You realize you just made twenty yards against my varsity?"

"Huh?"

It was true. He'd thought he'd made a couple of yards. He'd really made twenty!

The coach was excited. "Not only that. You did it without any real interference. You had a bad toss from center. You were fifteen yards back before you got started. You ran that ball thirty-five yards!"

Jigger looked at the ground. "I was luck—"

"The devil you were!" Davis turned toward his varsity players. "Take a look at this man. He's a ball-toting fool and he doesn't know it. From now on, he's the sparkplug of this team!"

"Hey!" It was El Camp, captain and right end. "Aren't you kinda going out on a limb? Jigger looks good, all right, but—"

The coach's eyes withered the captain. "I know class when I see it. This kid is fast. He's shift. He turns on a dime. He can run like a rabbit. He's just what we needed to make this the best team in Seymour history." Davis surveyed the men soberly. "I'm trying to impress you men with the fact that you're a great team. You're headed straight for the Bowl!"

Bull Dawson gasped. "The Bowl?"

"Sounds screwy, eh? A little college like Seymour playing the Bowl. But we've got our best line in years. Five seniors. We've got a crackerjack schedule. Army, Navy, Cornell, Dartmouth, Princeton. All we needed was one good man to carry the mail!"

There was a long pause. Jigger shifted from one foot to the other. Davis' eyes were burning. He acted like a fanatic conceiving some world-rocking plan. Even the players were

affected, slowly succumbing to the coach's excitement.

El Camp said, "Holy Smoke! Maybe you're right!" Then the team captain frowned. "What course you taking, Jigger?"

"Huh?"

"What's your major?"

"Psychology. But—"

"I knew it," the team captain groaned, and threw up his hands. "What elementary Psych. are you taking?"

"Psych. 1. Under Mechlin."

"You'll have to switch to Psych 1A. You've got to steer clear of Mechlin."

"But he's the best man in the department. Why can't I take his course if I want to?"

"You'd flunk it."

"I had a B average last year," Jigger said proudly.

The team captain wasn't impressed. "That won't help you. Mechlin's death on football men. Flunks 'em on sight."

"But—but he must have some reason," Jigger protested. "What's he got against us?"

"Nobody knows. But he can flunk us. He's running the course. He gives out marks the way he chooses."

A deep scowl came over Jigger's face. He said, "I'm still gonna take Psych 1. I came here to study. That's more important than football."

It took a long moment to digest this statement. He grinned and said slowly, "You're our Rose Bowl ticket, Jigger. We're not gonna lose you to Mechlin till we're on that train. How 'bout it, fellas?" He waved, and the team edged closer. "All right, Jigger. Do you switch to 1A or don't you?"

Jigger signed up for the 1A course first thing after practice.

The Army cadets marched into the Seymour stadium with a trace of condescension. They regarded this opening game as a set-up, and had been instructed to refrain from unseemly cheering or throwing of hats at the opening touchdown.

"There was no 'opening-touchdown'. Not for Army."

The kickoff was high and far. Jigger pulled it out of the ozone, tucked it away. The team formed interference around him. He started zigzagging up the field.

He was in high gear when he reached his own forty. Most of his interferers were sprawled out behind him. Three tacklers rushed him, lunging. Jigger pivoted, raced sideways, feinted toward midfield, then crossed the fifty mark going full steam ahead.

The Army fullback dove at him. He stopped dead, leaped over the hurtling body, continued his dash up the field. He crossed the enemy forty, the thirty!

Seymour fans were screaming wildly. The cadets sat mute, gaping. Only two men remained who could possibly stop him!

Jigger passed the first man by simply outrunning him.

The safety man came forward on widespread legs, careful, cautious.

Jigger stabbed out with a jarring straight-arm. His shoulder tightened to meet the shock. The man went down like a ton of bricks. Jigger blazed over the goal to a piercing din from the Seymour stands.

Bull Dawson converted. The cadets sat frozen, unable to believe what had happened.



That stunned look didn't leave them throughout the game. Ten minutes later Jigger flipped a bullet pass to El Camp for another score. Again they converted. 14-0.

IN the final quarter Jigger got loose on a spinner, raced from midfield to the Army one, then took it over the very next play with an off-tackle spinner. Nobody cared that they missed the point.

20-0, favor Seymour!

The Army coach came into the showers and soberly congratulated Barney Davis.

"And I thought my boys weren't bad!" he mourned.

"They aren't," Davis consoled him. "This is the best team I'll ever have here at Seymour. Barring accidents, these boys are headed straight for the Bowl!"

He wasn't bragging. He just knew football. The scores proceeded to prove it. Seymour 20, Navy 6, Seymour 18, Cornell 3. They licked Dartmouth by two touchdowns, took Princeton by three. Only Ohio lay between them and an undefeated season.

The newspapers took them up. Talk was running toward a Bowl bid for them. If they could get past Ohio, it was in the bag!

Jigger, whose slashing, spectacular ball-toting had made it all possible, was rapidly becoming a football legend. Somehow he kept his head. But it was hard, with his picture in every sport section, with coeds fighting to win his attention.

The night after the Princeton game, El Camp burst into Jigger's room looking as if he'd just bitten into a wormy apple.

"Prof Winter's come down with pneumonia, Jigger!"

"Calm down," Jigger laughed. "He'll recover."

"Yeah, but Mechlin's gonna take

over the course. And half our team's enrolled in 1A. Looks like we're sunk."

Jigger frowned. "He won't have the nerve to flunk us. We've all been doing okay so far."

"He won't flunk us all. Just one or two, enough to ruin our chances. I tell you, he really hates football. He's screwy, I guess, but he's sure got us right where he wants us."

Jigger sighed. "You and I are safe, El. We're both rating B. Bull Dawson's probably due for the hatchet. But Samuels can take over at fullback. It oughta work out."

"It will," the captain said sourly, "for Mechlin!"

Three days later, when Professor Mechlin's mid-semester grades appeared on the bulletin board outside his office, the team was there in a group to inspect them. Of five varsity men enrolled in the course, the only one disqualified was—Jigger West!

El Camp was furious. He said, "I'm going in and sock him. He knows we're no ball team without you, Jigger. He figured that out. I'm gonna—"

Jigger said, "You're going in there, nothing. I'm going in myself!"

He turned the knob, pushed into the cubicle office. The professor removed his bifocals, rubbed his thick nose, and stared at him out of cold, gray eyes.

"Well?"

"I'd like to see my examination," Jigger said bluntly. "I think I've a right to know why I flunked."

"I'm really quite busy," the professor said curtly. "And it's customary to make an appointment. However, if you care to wait—"

"I'll wait."

Jigger sat down grimly. There was a copy of *Professors' Forum*, a bi-monthly journal, on top of the desk. He thumbed through it idly, came to

an article by Mechlin himself and a little boxed paragraph that read:

Professor Mechlin heads the Psychology Department at Seymour College. An authority on the conditioned reflex, and in younger days a noted athlete, he contributes frequently to *Professors' Forum*.

Noted athlete! Jigger frowned, trying to imagine the balding, heavy-set figure before him in an athletic setting. The minutes wore on. He said impatiently,

"How about it? I'm due at class in a couple minutes."

"You'd better get along then." Mechlin touched two pudgy palms together, swiveled back, and stared at the ceiling. "Your request is rather unusual, West. I'm not in the habit of having my honesty questioned."

Jigger stiffened. "Then you refuse? You won't say what's wrong with my paper?"

Mechlin's hard gray eyes swung around. He said evenly, "That's it exactly."

Jigger dug his nails into the wooden arm rests. His eyes burned into the other's bland face, then he stood up without a word and swept through the door, slamming it hard.

El Camp walked down the hall with him. The team captain's face fell a mile when he heard the verdict. Jigger said bleakly, "Don't take it so hard. One man isn't a ball team. You guys will just have to fight that much harder."

"Yeah. Sure," Camp said weakly. "We'll show him, Jigger."

A large contingent of Ohio fans invaded town for the climax game. Both teams were undefeated so far. The Bowl bid was certain to go to the winner.

Jigger paced morosely about his small room in the dorm. He wasn't even going to the game. Too much

like attending a wake, he'd decided.

A dull roar from the stadium told him the game had started. He picked up some books and went to the library.

He tried to study. The words danced all over the page, refused to make sense. He drifted toward the magazine racks, seeking distraction. Another burst of sound from the stadium, and he glumly chalked up six points for Ohio.

He found a stack of *Professors' Forum's*, leafed through them disgustedly. Then he stiffened, staring at an article by Mechlin called, "*Football in Modern Education*."

Three minutes later he was double-timing toward Mechlin's office. The professor looked up from his desk in surprise when Jigger stormed in.

"Ever consider knocking, West?"

"I've just been reading some stuff you wrote," Jigger panted. "About football!"

"So?"

"So maybe the Dean would like to read it. It might explain why I flunked, why you refuse to go over my paper with me."

Mechlin flashed a superior grin. "Don't be absurd. Anybody who wants to can read that article."

"But who does read it?" Jigger retorted. "Psychology professors, mostly. Circulation 800. I'll bet the Dean hasn't seen it."

The professor blanched. "You can't intimidate me, West."

Jigger said, "You flunked me on purpose. Because you hate football. You can't deny it!"

Mechlin breathed in and out hard. His face reddened with anger, then his big shoulders slumped. He said slowly, "It's possible I made a mistake. I'll take another look at your paper." He fumbled among a stack on the desk, found what he wanted, pretended to scan it. After a moment, he said, "I was a trifle hasty in marking

this. I must have been tired, or—"

"Then I'm passing your course?"

Mechlin nodded. Jigger turned out the door and raced toward the gym. The team had just come in for the half. The bad news was on their faces. 12-0 against them already.

Coach Barney Davis listened intently while Jigger talked fast, explaining. A light came into the coach's eyes, and he said crisply,

"All right. Jump into your stuff. We've still got a chance. Two quick touchdowns will do it."

Sound spumed from both stands when Jigger ran out on the field with his mates. The Ohio players sized him up grimly, raced down fast at the kickoff. It sailed to Jigger on his own ten yard stripe. He faded away from the charging Ohioans, started churning his legs up the field. They forced him out on his own thirty-five.

They huddled briefly, deployed. The ball spiraled back to Jigger. He retreated as the enemy charged him. His right arm flashed. The ball zipped down the field in a low arc, straight to the arms of El Camp. The captain made it to the Ohio thirty before being stopped.

"Same play," Jigger snapped. "They won't expect it."

They didn't. Jigger was forced back even farther this time, but he put more steam behind the toss. It looked as if it would sail over Camp's head. The captain leaped skyward, snared it, then scooted safely into pay dirt.

Jigger went off tackle for the extra point. 12-7, favor Ohio.

Ohio received. Stung by the score, they let loose a savage attack of their own. The battered Seymour line crumbled as the Ohioans piled up first downs against them.

The fourth quarter started. The hands of the time clock clicked steadily. The two teams seemed deadlocked in midfield. Ohio kicked. Jig-

ger spoke fiercely into the huddle.

"Come on. Let's give. Time's getting short."

They tried. They broke their backs trying, but it just wasn't there. They were dog-tired now, almost dead.

Jigger took the snap-back from center, faded. The line gave way; tacklers swarmed at him, arms upstretched. He searched frantically for a pass receiver. One end had been knocked for a loop, and El Camp was hemmed in by two rangy backs.

Jigger raced toward the sideline, hoping to skirt around end. They boxed him. Two men pounced on him. He felt as if he'd lost three good teeth. But he hadn't. Only three good yards.

Third down, and the clock said three more minutes. Jigger made first down around end. El Camp said, mildly,

"You're puffed. Let somebody else—"

"I'm okay," Jigger said. "And I've got an idea."

Camp shot a curious, half-resentful glance at him as they broke from the huddle.

Jigger took the ball on the run. Camp threw himself at an incoming half, cut him down neatly. Jigger shot through the gap, knees flying. He swiveled away from two clutching hands, stepped into the clear. Something hit him hard from behind. A pile-up of muscle and bone landed on him.

LINESMEN raced from the sideline to measure the ball, while the crowd sat tense. A whiteclad arm waved Seymour on, and a cheer swelled up from the local fans. First down on Ohio's forty!

Two more minutes! Jigger was panting. He said, "We're gonna fool 'em. I'll tote it again. I'm tryin' to build up a decoy."

Bull Dawson frowned. "Listen—"

Jigger waved him off as the ump came toward them, threatening an overtime penalty. They took places fast, the ball came to Jigger West.

Jigger bent down and charged, pumping hard. They hit him right behind the line, but he ended up with a five yard gain.

El Camp glanced at the clock, said fretfully, "What goes on? Why pound the line? There's only one minute left. We oughta pass."

Jigger said, "Hold it, El. I'm workin' on somethin'."

He took it again, rammed at the line. They were ready for him.

The team was surly, disgruntled. Jigger talked fast. "This is the one. There's only time for one more play.

They think I'm gonna run again, Bull. Think you can toss one?"

The fullback grinned. "You bet!"

Jigger said, "I'm going out with El. We'll stick together. One of us oughta get free. The other can run interference."

The fullback nodded. A Bowl bid was riding on this play.

"Hup. Hup!"

Jigger shifted with precise, charted steps. The two lines tensed, eyes on the ball. The center's fingers trembled as he grasped the leather. His elbows flexed; the ball shot back to Dawson, high and far. Bull faded away from the eager rush of Ohio tacklers.

Jigger shouldered a lanky end off his feet, darted into the enemy backfield. El Camp was right beside him. Defense men rushed over to cover them. Jigger suddenly swerved to his left.

The defense men hesitated, trying to decide which man to cover.

Bull Dawson's frantic, last-minute toss was a beauty. Straight as a die. A defense man raced over to block it. Jigger went forward, leaped, pulled it down. The Ohio quarterback lunged at him.

He sidestepped, dashed down the

field. He crossed the forty, the thirty. They were ganging up on him, cutting him off. El Camp loomed beside him, started to throw himself at one of the tacklers. Jigger yelled:

"Cut, El! Cut! Lateral!"

The team captain veered sideward. The Ohio halfback left his feet in a dive at Jigger. He let go the ball, shovelled it leftward. El Camp picked it out of the air, raced madly onward.

The safety man rushed over to stop him. But Camp outran him, went over the line standing up!

A cascade of sound poured from the grandstand. 13-12, favor Seymour! The Bowl game was in, for the first time in Seymour history!

El Camp was saying bewilderedly, "How'd you get fixed up with Mechlin, Jigger? You haven't explained—"

Jigger said, "I stumbled on an article he wrote, explaining why he hates football. He used to play himself, back in prep school. He and his brother. Until his brother accepted a bribe and was expelled, and—because of that, Mechlin says—became a professional gambler. So now Mechlin hates college football and—"

"He's taking it out on us."

"Sure. He'd like to do away with the game. He can't, of course. But he can try to finish it here at Seymour. He flunks one or two players each year, obviously figuring we'll have a string of bad seasons, and eventually give up in disgust. When I threatened to show that article to the Dean, Mechlin suddenly decided not to flunk me after all."

El Camp scowled. "The so-and-so. We oughta turn him in to—"

Jigger said, "Why bother? But we can keep a copy around, just in case. It'll give the fellows a fair chance to pass Mechlin's course after this."

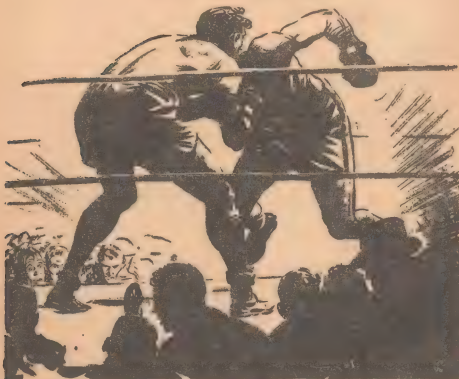
The captain grinned, but absently. Because in his mind's eye he was already leading his team into the Bowl. . . .

GREAT RING NOVELET OF A KID WHO COUNTED ON HARD AND FAST FISTS!

FIST FEVER

By H. C. BUTLER

Author of "Killer Gloves," etc.



How far could a green kid go in the fight game with a couple of educated fists and nothing in his heart? Was it fast footwork and smart boxing that copped a championship, or hatchets in the hands and the killer instinct?

THIS FIGHT was going to be like all his others. Quick, short — two rounds, maybe three. Jimmy Steele, sitting on his stool before the start of the second, knew it.

"I can get this guy next round," he said to Mike Roper, his fat little manager. He wasn't boasting — it was the truth. He had Finelli on the go.

Roper's round global face slid into

a frown. "Take it easy," he growled. "You don't have to hurry."

"I do have to hurry," said Jimmy evenly.

That was the truth, too, Jimmy knew it better than any one else — better than Mike Roper knew it; and certainly better than any of his opponents had ever known it. He was strictly a short-fight man. He couldn't

stand more than four or five rounds. After that, it was the other guy's fight.

Jimmy watched Jackson, his diminutive Negro trainer, rub his arms with the towel. His arms! That was it. It wasn't his legs that gave out, he wasn't too heavy or out of condition. It was his arms every time. For four rounds they packed plenty of power — like atom bombs with gloves on. He could ladle out hard, stiff, bone-jarring punches with either hand. But always, about the fifth round, he got arm-weary. The strength seemed to seep out of his fingertips, leaving his arms heavy and dead.

Of course, Mike Roper had always insisted it wasn't arm-weariness at all. "It ain't your arms," he kept saying. "You got a mental complex. You ain't like other fighters, kid — you don't like to fight. You just go through the motions for a few rounds, then you get tired of it. It's your *spirit* that gets tired — and you feel weary all over and can't throw punches anymore. Change your mental attitude toward the fight-game, and you'll end up the champ."

Well, maybe so — and maybe not. It was true that he didn't like fighting. In fact, he came pretty close to hating it. But he needed money and he needed it quick — and the ring seemed to offer the best chance.

Jimmy's burning ambition was to be a civil engineer. He would need money to pay for the course, and to live on until he was established. At first, there hadn't seemed to be any way of getting it, but he was young and strong and fast — and the ring beckoned.

So he'd gone into it. And right away he and Mike Roper started talking different languages. Roper would say, "I got you a bout with so-and-so. It's another step toward the middle-weight championship." And Jimmy

would ask, "How much is the purse?"

The bell ended Jimmy's thoughts abruptly, sent him dancing into the center of the ring. Finelli had taken a rough going over in the first round, and he was being cautious. He bicycled as Jimmy went after him.

Jimmy moved in fast, snaking a right into Finelli's mouth. Then he hooked a dynamite-packed left into Finelli's breadbasket. Finelli swooshed air and backed against the ropes, Jimmy stalking him like a tiger.

Jimmy thought, this is a lousy way to make a living. He could find no pleasure in beating a man senseless, but that was the fight-game. And, although he disliked it, he played that game fair and square. He fought hard and savagely, and always cleanly.

Jimmy ripped into Finelli, battering his face with lefts and rights. Finelli edged away along the hemp, finally escaped the punishment. Jimmy turned, went after him relentlessly.

So he'd end it as quick as he could — and that would serve two purposes. He'd get rid of an unpleasant task, and he'd do it before his own arms got so weary he couldn't fight anymore.

Jimmy caught Finelli's jaw with a stiff right jab that rocked his head. Finelli came back fast, plastered a right into Jimmy's mouth that drew blood. Then Jimmy impaled him with a long, looping right that thudded against Finelli's temple.

Finelli's knees buckled, then he staggered away. There was a wild, half-frightened look in his eyes, and Jimmy knew he had his man. He bore in, slashing Finelli with rights and lefts that drove him against the ropes again. With the kill in sight, Jimmy didn't let up. He kept battering away until Finelli slipped down the ropes to the canvas.

The ref waved Jimmy to a neutral corner, then picked up the count from the knockdown time-keeper. Finelli was still sleeping peacefully when the ref got to ten.

Jimmy trudged to his corner. So it was another quick victory. During the little while he had been with Roper he'd come a long way. There had been seven knockouts in seven fights, all of them in the early rounds. The fans had never seen him in a long fight, yet — so they didn't know what he knew. They didn't know that after five rounds his arms were gone.

Oh, well — what they didn't know wouldn't hurt them.

JIMMY went up the aisle to his dressing room to the acclaim of frenzied fight-fans. Once inside, away from the roar, he plopped down wearily into a chair.

Mike Roper waddled into the room like a little duck. He was a short man, but with plenty of circumference at the equator. His face was round and pinkish — and right now it was split in a broad smile.

"Nice fight, kid!" he complimented. "I think I got the next champ, Jackson!" He looked at the little Negro and they both grinned at each other.

"You shure have, Mistah Mike!" said Jackson.

Jimmy sighed drearily. "Can the build-up," he said. "How much do we get?"

Roper's smiling face deteriorated into a sad frown. "There you go again!" he complained. "Always thinking about the dough. Don't you realize you just licked Tony Finelli? And don't you realize the next step up the ladder is a championship fight with Eddie Tanner?"

Jimmy shrugged. "So what? How much do we get?"

"About five thousand!" snapped Roper angrily. He paced the floor like a caged beast while he watched

Jackson take the tape off Jimmy's hands. At last he waddled to a halt in front of Jimmy, glared at him through slitted eyes in his rotund face.

"That's the trouble with you!" he said evenly. "Sometimes I think you're going to be the next champ — and sometimes I don't. You've gone a long way in the fight racket with a couple hard fists and nothing in the heart —"

"Forget it" Jimmy waved his hand impatiently. "You know where I stand on that. I don't like the fight game, and I'm in it for some quick dough. When I get enough, I pull out."

"Sure, sure!" There was raw bitterness in Roper's tone. "But maybe you ought to think about somebody else besides yourself. I've wanted to manage a champ all my life. I've nursed you along until you're within sight of the title." He licked his lips with the tip of his tongue. "Look, Jimmy — you take the champ in your next fight and we'll both be happy."

"Happy as a lark," said Jimmy, grinning.

Roper scowled. "You need more heart, Jimmy," he said. "You go out there and fight a whale of a fight — but for why? Just because you want to get it over with. Because you don't like it. You'd be a great fighter, and a sure champion, if you only had a little spirit. A little of the killer-instinct — some fist fever."

Jimmy shrugged, ran his fingers through black hair. "I can't help it, Mike. If you don't like a thing, you just don't like it. I don't want to fight, and the title doesn't mean anything to me. I want to be an engineer — and after that, I want to get hitched and have a flock of kids —"

"Kids!" yiped Roper. "So, okay. You love children, and you're a family man. Also, you're an engineer. In fact, you're everything but a fighter.

... Why do I get tangled up with guys like you?"

Jimmy's grin broadened. Then, suddenly, his gray eyes lit up.

"Look, Roper," he said eagerly. "If I fight Eddie Tanner, how much will the purse be?"

Roper smacked his pink forehead with the palm of a chubby hand. "Money! Dough! Mazuma! Can't you talk anything else?"

"How much?" repeated Jimmy.

Roper screwed up his fat face. "How should I know? It'll maybe be a sell-out. The dough will be plenty, although the champ will get the big end of the purse. Now, after you're the champ —"

Jimmy had a dreamy, far-away look in his eyes. "I think it'll be enough," he said slowly.

Alarm crept into Mike Roper's round face, hung there. "What'll be enough?"

"The dough I get on the title bout," said Jimmy. "With what I have, I think it'll be enough to pull out."

Roper's little eyes went narrow. His voice came hoarsely when he spoke.

"Pull out?" He took a deep breath. "Look, Jimmy. You can't just take the title and then walk out of the ring!"

"Who can't?"

"You can't! You got to defend the title at least a couple times."

Jimmy smiled, "We're ahead of ourselves. How do you know I'll even beat this Tanner?"

Roper waved his hand as though losing to the champ was out of the question. "You'll beat him. You'll beat him for no reason except that you want to get the fight over with."

Jimmy chuckled, ran his fingers through his air again.

"I don't know, Mike. This Tanner's a fancy boxer. He's hard to hit. I'll wear my arms out trying to sock him."

"Your arms!" snapped Roper. "Why can't you forget about your arms? I say they're okay. After four or five rounds, you just get tired of fighting. Your spirit gives out—not your arms!"

"Call it what you want," Jimmy said dully. "But after five rounds my arms feel like they're going to drop off —"

He stopped abruptly, noticing the look of horror spreading over Roper's face. Then he watched the little fat man waddle across the dressing room to the door. A tall, red-headed man was standing just inside the door, with a slanted grin on his ruddy face.

JIMMY knew him. It was Red Haynes, who ran a sport column for the Daily. He was a sensation-hunter, always on the prowl for something he could pass off to the public as inside dope. He had as many ethics as a dictator.

"How did you get in here?" demanded Roper.

Haynes just smiled, ignored the question. "Now that's news!" he said brightly. "The leading challenger to the middleweight crown is arm-weary. Something the dear, gullible fight-fan never suspected. If the champ decides to make a long fight of it, Mr. Challenger is all washed up. That'll make a choice article for my column tomorrow. A scoop!"

Roper's pink face turned a deeper crimson. "If you print one word of that, I'll —"

"Tsk, ts! No threats, little man! Freedom of the press, you know!" Haynes smiled lopsidedly and walked from the room.

Roper stood staring at the door a moment, then spun like a top to face Jimmy.

"That does it!" he howled. "He'll plaster that story all over his dirty column. And then you know what'll happen?"

"No — what?" Jimmy kept grinning.

"The champ'll read it!" exploded Roper. "And he'll plan his strategy for a long fight. And if you don't get more spirit into you than you've got, you'll end up with birds twittering in your noggin!"

Jimmy laughed. "Don't you see, Mike, that it doesn't make any difference? I don't give a hoot about the title. All I want is the lettuce. I figure on pulling out after the Tanner fight anyway — win, lose or draw."

Roper looked suddenly anxious. "Not if you win, Jimmy," he begged. "If you win, promise to defend the title a couple times."

Jimmy pursed his lips. "And if I lose?"

"If you lose, then you can pull out like you want."

Jimmy frowned. There was something about Roper he liked. The guy had always wanted to manage a champ, and Jimmy hated to blast his dreams. So if he won, maybe a couple more fights wouldn't matter too much. He held out his hand and Roper grabbed it eagerly.

"It's a deal," Jimmy said.

JIMMY always "slept in" on the morning following a fight. But the morning after the Finelli bout was different. Jimmy's phone rang at eight o'clock, scaring him out of a sound sleep.

He grabbed the instrument and grunted a sleepy hello. Mike Roper's voice, strained and taut, came to him.

"Did you see it, Jimmy?" he demanded. "Did you see it?"

"See what?"

"The morning papers! It's full of it!"

Jimmy sighed impatiently. "What's full of what?"

"Red Haynes' column! All about how you're arm-weary, how you can't go more than four rounds. And sug-

gesting, mind you, that if the champ makes it a long fight, you're washed up."

"He's right," drawled Jimmy, yawning widely.

"Okay! So even if he is, must he give Tanner ideas?"

"Who cares?" asked Jimmy blandly. "Maybe I'm due for a licking. Regardless, I'll haul down enough money to —"

"Money!" shrieked Roper. "Get a little fist fever, Jimmy! You told me you'd win that title —"

"I said I'd try — and I will," replied Jimmy. "But if I don't, I'm not worrying about it."

Jimmy trained for the fight with Tanner in his usual colorless way. He was calm and methodical about it, exhibiting no excitement or anticipation. Roper made several attempts to instill a fighting heart in him, so that he'd go into the ring resembling something more than an automatic robot. But it was no use.

Jimmy said: "Quit trying, Mike. I'll go after the champ like I've gone after all of them. I'll try to finish him quick, before the old arms go back."

But Roper shook his head. "It won't work this time, kid. The champ's a boxer. He'll stay away from you, let you wear yourself out. After four rounds, he'll start. That's when a good fighting heart will come in handy."

But Roper's statements didn't move Jimmy. He kept training in his usual lackadaisical style until, suddenly, the night of the Tanner bout was on him.

Before the bout, Jimmy sat on the rubbing table, listening to Roper's careful instructions. The fat manager had apparently resigned himself to the inevitable, because he said:

"Finish him quick, Jimmy — if you can. I've tried to put a little fist fever in you, thinking that if you went in there with the proper mental at-

titude your arms wouldn't give you trouble. But you haven't responded, kid. It'll have to be like all your other fights. Either you finish him early, or he'll finish you late."

Jimmy smiled, then rubbed fingertips together in a miserly gesture.

"It's a capacity crowd," he said.

He broke off then, staring at the dressing room door. Just outside was an excited bustle and commotion. Somebody cried, "Give him air!" Then the door burst open and a man stumbled in, carrying a young boy, maybe nine years old, in his arms. He rushed the youngster to the rubbing table and placed him down next to Jimmy.

"What's the matter —" began Roper.

The man said: "This kid was crushed by the mob outside your door! Suffocated, I think!"

Jimmy glanced at the boy — the pale, drawn face topped by curly blond hair. Then, quickly, he went into action.

"Artificial respiration!" he snapped. And the next instant he was on top of the table, straddling the child with his knees. His hands he placed in the small of the boy's waist, palms downward, and with a slow rhythmic motion he proceeded to work over the stricken child.

"Get a doctor, Jackson," said Roper.

Jimmy nodded agreement, while he kept his mind on the job he was doing. He worked for several minutes, while beads of perspiration dotted his brow. The boy stirred restlessly, and Jimmy had the thrill of knowing his efforts were resulting in success. Then, suddenly, Roper's frantic voice cut the silence.

"Jimmy! Your arms! You're — wearing them out!"

It was the first Jimmy thought of it. All at once he was aware of a strange weakness seeping through

his arm-muscles. Roper was on the table beside him.

"Let me do it!" he rapped. "I can do it!"

Jimmy nodded dully, then moved over and let Roper finish the job. In a minute or two the boy responded fully, and his breathing became regular. Jackson returned with a doctor who, after looking the child over and complimenting Jimmy on his quick action, took the boy away.

Jimmy dropped into a chair, let his arms dangle at his side. He felt the blood rush into his fingertips, like warm water.

Roper's face was red and bloated. "Of all the stinking breaks I ever heard of, that was the worst!" he complained. "How's your — arms?"

Jimmy shrugged. "Tired," he said shortly. "I think they'll be all right, though, by the time I get in the ring."

And by fight-time, they seemed all right. The weariness was out of them and they felt normal. The only thing was, Jimmy didn't know how long they'd last him now. He wondered if, this time, they'd even hold up for four rounds.

THE ref, a bald-headed little man who had once been a lightweight, called the fighters to the center of the ring. Jimmy and Tanner touched gloves, and Jimmy looked the champ over with an expert eye. He was a tough-looking gazabo, with a jaw made of granite and muscles that would put Tarzan to shame. He had a slight sneer on his face — a confident, cocky smirk.

"You boys know the rules," the ref said. "I want a clean fight — no low blows — break clean —"

Jimmy trotted back to his corner. Jackson grabbed the robe, and Roper gave him last minute instructions.

"Go after him," he said. "Don't let him bicycle. Show him you can punch his silly head off."

Jimmy thought, yeah. Finish him off in a hurry, for two reasons. Because he didn't like the job he had to do in the first place, and because his arms wouldn't hold up very long. Two good reasons.

The bell sent Jimmy dancing into the center of the ring to meet the champ.

Tanner came out cautiously, in a half-crouch, with his chin buried behind his left shoulder, his left glove extended. He pedaled in the center of the ring a few seconds and Jimmy thought, don't let him do that. Go in and plaster him.

Jimmy saw Tanner's bullet-head behind the wine-colored gloves and lashed out with a hard right. But the head wasn't there when the blow landed. Tanner parried it with his glove easily and tapped Jimmy on the nose with his right before dancing away.

So it was going to be that way. Tanner on the bicycle, elusive, hard to hit. Jimmy crouched, stalked forward.

He went in under a right that the champ threw, buried his gloves deep in Tanner's solarplexus. Then he came upstairs, lashing at Tanner's face with rights and lefts. But Tanner rolled with the punches, then danced away with a grin on his face.

Jimmy kept thinking, you've only got a few rounds. Get him early. Else you'll be in for a hell of a beating.

He threw a hard, looping right at Tanner's jaw, and when Tanner faded away Jimmy almost fell to the canvas from the momentum. The crowd let out a delighted howl.

In his corner at the end of the first, Jimmy said:

"He's like a shadow. You can't find him."

Roper scowled. "Crowd him. Get him against the ropes where he can't get away. Then feed him the works."

Sure, thought Jimmy. Sounds easy. He went out for the second.

The second round was worse than the first. Jimmy stalked in, determined to get Tanner in a hurry. But it didn't work. All his hardest blows thudded against Tanner's gloves and shoulders. Many of them missed.

"He should get roller skates," growled Roper between rounds.

Jimmy chest rose and fell evenly as he looked across the ring at Tanner. The champ was smiling confidently.

"Take it easy. Don't wear yourself out," said Roper now.

"How can I take it easy?" rapped Jimmy. "I got to make it quick. If I loaf, I'm washed out in the late rounds. My arms —"

The bell sent him out for the third.

Jimmy thought, it's this round or next. After that, my arms will go dead and heavy. It'll be Tanner's fight from there on.

Jimmy hooked a left that got through to Tanner's jaw, but once more the champ rolled with the punch. He threw another left, then a right. Both missed by inches.

Tanner grinned broadly. It was a grin that said, "Wear yourself out, sucker. When you're finished, I'll start." Jimmy tossed another right, missed again. The crowd let out a lusty roar, and some wit in a ringside seat howled, "Paint a target on his nose!"

JIMMY went in again, this time crowding Tanner against the ropes. But the champ was cagey. He ducked, weaved, slid away along the hemp. He stuck a glove in Jimmy's mouth as he faded away, and Jimmy came back with a left hook that swished air.

When Jimmy walked slowly back to his corner at the bell, he felt the first tinges of weariness in his arms.

"How you feeling, kid?" asked Roper anxiously. Jimmy noticed he

didn't say, "How are your arms?" But he meant it.

Jimmy watched Jackson sponge him off, felt the cold water trickle over his chest and stomach.

"I'm okay," he lied. "I think I got him figured now. I ought to tag him for keeps next round."

"Go to it, kid," said Roper.

Jimmy went to it, but it was the same old story. Tanner stayed on the bicycle and Jimmy chased him. Jimmy managed to tag the elusive champ with several blows, but each time Tanner was going away when the punch landed and it did no damage.

When the fourth ended, Jimmy trudged back to his corner — and this time his arms hung at his side with a numb feeling in them. Roper guessed it at once.

"You feeling it in the arms again, kid?" he asked, his fat face clouding.

This time Jimmy nodded. "I'm through," he said in a low voice. "He can open up now and finish me any time he wants."

"Aw, you're crazy, kid! Get in there and fight!" said Roper, with a show of confidence.

But Jimmy knew better. He went out for the fifth, and right away he sensed a change in the champ. Apparently this was the round Tanner had planned for — the round when he'd start throwing the works.

And how he threw it!

Jimmy got the first taste of it when he danced to ring-center to open the round. The champ met him with a roundhouse right to the temple that sent him reeling backward.

Tanner came in, then, forcing the fight. He lashed out with stiff right and left jabs that rocked Jimmy's head. Jimmy countered with rights and lefts of his own, but there was no power in them. The champ just grinned and brushed them off. This time the grin said, "You're all

through, pal. You can't throw any more hard ones, and I'm just beginning."

Jimmy found himself back-pedaling as the champ moved in. All at once there was a painful glove buried deep in his stomach, then another one clattering against his mouth. Jimmy managed to get his gloves up in front of his face, but he could feel the weakness in his arms as he held them there.

Desperately, Jimmy fell into a clinch, but the ref broke them. For a few seconds he stood and slugged it out with Tanner, his tired arms swinging like windmills gone crazy, but finally he gave ground. There was no power in his dead arms, while the champ's blows were cutting him to ribbons.

Tanner crowded Jimmy into the ropes, then opened up on his face. For a few seconds Jimmy thought there was nothing in the world except leather battering his face. Then he groped his way along the ropes and escaped.

But not for long. The champ was on him again, following him relentlessly. A hard right slashed at Jimmy's eye, and Jimmy felt something warm and moist trickle down his eyelash. Then the bell rang.

Jimmy sat on the stool, while Jackson worked frantically to stop the bleeding of the cut on his eye. Roper, his round face anxious, said:

"Jimmy. I got to tell you something."

Jimmy didn't say anything, just waited.

"We'll protest this fight," Roper said. "We'll go to the Boxing Commission. We'll do something —"

Jimmy looked up wearily. "What are you talking about?"

"That Tanner!" growled Roper, and his fat face was florid with anger now. "He framed you!"

"Framed me?"

Roper nodded. He started talking fast.

"Remember that kid they carried into your dressing room—the one that was supposed to be suffocated? That was a fix. Jackson just sneaked around to Tanner's corner and heard his seconds talking about it."

Jimmy winced as Jackson went to work on the cut eye with collodion.

"You mean —"

"I mean that Tanner hired the kid to fake a faint, so you'd wear out your arms giving him artificial respiration!"

Jimmy scowled. "You're crazy, Mike!"

"I'm not. Think it over once. Why should they drag the kid into your dressing room in the first place? And did you notice how the guy that carried the kid placed him down on the rubbing table, right next to you. That Tanner had it all figured out. He wanted you to use up your arms before the fight — and you did!"

Jimmy looked across at Tanner, still sitting there with an arrogant smirk on his face. In Jimmy's punch-clouded mind, it hardly made sense. But apparently Tanner had pulled a cute trick.

Something deep inside of Jimmy rebelled. As much as he had disliked fighting, he had always fought fair and square — and hard. Crookedness and shady dealings were no part of him, and he felt a violent dislike for anyone who employed them. When he answered the bell, a spreading anger burned at his insides.

He thought, "The dirty so-and-so! I ought to blast him clear out of the ring!"

Tanner, not realizing the sudden change in his opponent, made no effort to box. He came in with both fists swinging. Jimmy promptly backed him up with a right that rocked his head one way, and a left that rocked it to the other.

Tanner went back on his heels, staggered a couple steps, then caught himself. He danced away, then, while his head cleared. Jimmy noticed a surprised look on his face, but the champ came back to see if it were really true.

He came in low, hooking a right into Jimmy's breadbasket. But Jimmy had his own right coming up from the canvas. It landed on the point of Tanner's chin and sent him reeling dizzily against the ropes.

The crowd started howling now, as Jimmy followed up the blow. Although he had no time to analyze it then, Jimmy felt suddenly very different. The weariness in his arms had miraculously disappeared, and, strangely, he was beginning to enjoy this fight! He was getting, for the first time, a savage thrill out of battering Tanner into submission!

For the first time in his ring career, he was mad enough to *want* to fight!

Grimly, he went after Tanner on the ropes, lading up rights and lefts that hammered against the champ's face mercilessly. Tanner faded along the hemp, covering his face with his gloves and arms as he slid away. Jimmy promptly went downstairs, driving breath-sapping blows to the ribs and stomach.

Tanner took it for a time, then dropped his guard to cover his middle. That was his mistake. Jimmy plastered him with three hard lefts to the side of the head, followed by a stinging right to the chin. He saw a glazed look come into Tanner's eyes, and the champ's legs got wobbly.

SO this was the finish, thought Jimmy. And this time it wasn't an automatic, robot finish. It was a finish that Jimmy enjoyed. He put his weight behind the next blow — a paralyzing hook to the champ's button. With a little groan, Tanner slipped to the canvas.

The ref counted, but he wouldn't have had to. Tanner was still stretched on the canvas when the ref got to ten. Jimmy felt a warm feeling go through him as his arm was raised over his head and the ref bawled:

"The winnah—and new champion! Jimmy Steele!"

Jimmy hardly heard the roar of the crowd, although it was deafening. He felt Roper mauling him in the center of the ring, and he saw Jackson beaming with pride. Then he was taking the long walk down the aisle to the dressing room. And, back in the room, he listened to the dull roar of the crowd outside.

"The new champ!" yelled Roper happily. "Kid, you really leveled him when you got started!"

Jackson's mouth was wide-split across his face. "Ah thinks Mistah Jimmy's got a new spirit," he said.

"And how!" exulted Roper. "I could see the way you went after Tanner in that last round that you were enjoying it. You got a kick out of finishing him!"

Jimmy nodded grimly. "Yeah—guess I did. I don't like a guy that'll stoop to something dirty to win. I guess it made me mad."

"Boy—and how you fight when you're mad!" Roper enthused. "I figured if you were mad enough you'd—"

He stopped as Jimmy's head came up suddenly. Jimmy's gray eyes swept Roper from head to toe, then pinned him with a piercing look.

"So that's it!" he said. "I'm just beginning to get it!"

Roper looked concerned. "Get what, kid?"

"Tanner didn't pull that deal with the kid at all!" said Jimmy, through clenched teeth. "You did!"

Roper's eyes bulged out of his round face, and there was a trace of sudden nervousness in his voice.

"Now, look, kid—"

"Sure," said Jimmy grimly. "That's the angle. You did it!" He jumped from the rubbing table, stalked toward Roper. "Come on, Mike. Give me the dope. I want to hear it from you."

Roper backed up, holding out his chubby hands. "Now, take it easy, kid—take it easy! I'll come clean. I did it. I did it for your own good."

"Go on," said Jimmy.

Roper went on. "I figured all the time that your arm-weariness was all imagination. That it was just the result of your not liking to fight. I knew Tanner would drag the fight out, and that he'd lick you unless I was able to give you a new spirit. Give you something worth fighting for—put some fist fever in you. So I decided to make you mad. Well, I framed up the deal with the kid. I knew you liked kids, and would be the first one to help the kid when he was brought in. So I let you—then blamed the whole frame on Tanner when I thought you needed it in the fight."

Jimmy said: "You played a desperate game, Mike. You might have really worn out my arms on that kid."

"Nuts!" said Roper. "I knew your arms were okay. It was the fist fever you needed, and I gave it to you."

Despite himself, Jimmy felt a slow smile creep across his face. Roper's tiny eyes brightened as he saw it.

"You see what you can do in the ring if you have a fighting heart?" he said, trying to clinch the argument. "You'll be a great champion from now on."

"From now on?" Jimmy grinned. "Two more fights, Roper. Then I quit for that engineering course."

Roper shrugged. "Okay—that was the agreement." He turned and grinned at Jackson.

"I wonder," he said, "what kind of deal we can cook up to get Jimmy mad for his next fight?"

•
**SMASH
NOVELET OF A
PIGSKIN
BATTERING-RAM
WHO RAN
WILD!**
•



TOUCHDOWN TROUBLE

by GILES A. LUTZ

Author of "Hothead Halfback," etc.

PRESNELL U was inside Bordon's thirty. The going was getting tougher by the minute. All afternoon, Bordon had given

away yardage as lavishly as a bankrupt man hands out hundred dollar bills. Now they were getting positively stingy.

Nibs clutched the ball and went straight up the middle, the blockers walling him in!



It was always a glory spot, which always meant that the coach's back-field pets would carry the leather, but nobody knew better than Presnell U's battering-ram, Nibs Golden, that it wasn't only touchdowns that won a ball game. . . .

Marty Hammond, Presnell's signal-barker, said, "Number—"

"56," Nibs Golden interrupted wearily. "And Marty will carry." Nibs was built like Gargantua, but he had

a lot more speed. He had a rough-hewn face, usually set in a good-humored grin. He wasn't grinning now. He was tired, and he hurt in more places than some. The Bordon line-

men had been using brass knuckles and knives on him fifty-five minutes. That was plenty of minutes, particularly when Marty Hammond and Dirk Stevens, his room-mate, grabbed all the glory.

Nibs looked at his brother, and said, "Block hard for Hammond and the new field house."

Stretch Golden nodded. He was long and lean, with hard hands and face. He blocked like a runaway elephant. He could carry that thing too. At least, he had in his freshman year.

Nibs used to be a pretty fair hand with the leather himself until Marty took over this year. Now, it was Marty and Dirk doing the things that made the headlines.

Nibs hitched into the blocking position. Marty had his head up so the stands could see his profile. He took the pass from center, and wheeled and faked. Nibs got the incoming tackle. Marty tossed a shovel pass to Dirk, running wide. It was Nibs and Stretch against the strong side of Bordon's line.

Dirk went to the twenty-five. Nibs breathed noisily in disgust. That play had most of the Bordons on the ground. Dirk had picked up four yards. Dirk and Marty would rather look good than really carry that thing.

The referee waved them down the field. The stands gave a few desultory cheers. Presnell was thirteen points behind with only three minutes of the game left.

Marty said harshly, "If we could get some blocking."

Stretch yelled indignantly, "We put those guys in the first row. You want us to knock them clear out of the stadium?"

Nibs bent a baleful glare at Marty, but kept still. Nibs was older than Stretch by a couple of years. Nibs had been around enough to know that you batted your head against stone walls all you got was a sore head.

Last year, playing on the freshman team, had been different for Sketch. Well, last year had been different for Nibs, too. Last year, Coach Howe hadn't been here, and Marty hadn't played. Nibs put the thoughts out of his mind, and bent to his work.

Marty got two at the weak side. He skirted the end and lost the two. "Hold 'em," he screeched. "I'll kick it over."

Nibs exploded, "A lousy field goal won't do any good."

Marty said sullenly, "We'll score."

Dirk spoke up, "Those two have been beefing all season, Marty. Give it to them. Nibs and Stretch are good."

He wasn't giving away a thing. It was third and ten, and Bordon was really rooted in.

Nibs tightened his head-guard, and said, "You and me, kid. Let's look like ballplayers."

Stretch squinted at the goal-line. "It isn't so far. Follow me."

NIBS banged over the strong side, Stretch before him. Stretch got the tackle, plowed through, and smeared the backer-up. Nibs came through, running hard. The Bordon backs hit him. They hit him hard, but Nibs got another step.

The referee took the ball. Stretch danced around. "Nine, Nibs. You got nine yards."

Marty's face was a lovely storm color. "We kick now."

Stretch said belligerently, "It's our ball." The linemen growled assent. Marty looked at the scowling faces, and nodded weakly.

Nibs asked, "You want to look bad, Stretch?"

Stretch hitched up his pants. "Get those guys out of the way. I wanta run."

Nibs got two of them out of the way. Marty and Dirk weren't worth a damn. Stretch went through like

a barge going over Niagara Falls. The backer-up hit him, and glanced off. The wing-back finally got Stretch with a wild dive.

Stretch picked up seven, and they were down on the ten.

Nibs jeered, "Can't you carry that thing?"

Marty said, "56—"

The team's eyes glinted dangerously. This was a glory spot, and Marty was taking over again. Nibs said in a hard voice, "What was that, Marty?"

Marty looked around, and gulped.

"Why don't you go sit down?"

Stretch rasped.

Hippo said in an excited voice. "Nibs, through center. I got my guy softened up."

Nibs looked at Hippo's battered features. "You're walking in a dream, pal. Okay, let's go."

He grabbed the leather, and took off. He smashed at the piled-up line and the hole was there. He thought he was going all the way, but the Bordon safety was still standing. The safety got down, and clung tenaciously. Nibs bowled him over, but he was stopped a yard shy of the big, white line.

The team was alive, and impatient and eager. "It's yours, pal," Stretch said.

Nibs shook his head. "I've had my turn. Take 'em out, you guys."

When the Presnell line got through, the Bordon wall looked like an oat-field after a big wind. Stretch could have been on crutches, and still made it. He planted the ball under the up-rights, and grinned. "That's six points, Nibs."

Marty was sore. He stepped impatiently into the ball, Dirk, held, and flubbed it.

Stretch said, "Jeez, Nibs, we stink."

"Not we," Nibs corrected. "Just a couple of guys."

Marty didn't like that. Nibs didn't care. For a few minutes, the Presnell club looked like a team. The linemen cast hard looks at Marty. Nibs wondered if they were waking up.

Bordon took the kick-off, and rolled down the field. When the game ended, they were pounding at Presnell's twenty. Nibs straightened wearily. "Eight games this season, and we win one. I don't think we'll get a bowl bid this year."

Stretch walked in with him. "We got Tolley and Krovak riding the bench, and Marty and Dirk play."

"Marty and Dirk know a man," Nibs said. "Tolley and Krovak don't know that man."

"I wish Rocky Martin was coaching," Stretch gloomed. "This Coach Howe is a pain."

WHEN Dad Bowles retired last year, everyone thought Rocky Martin, the freshman coach, would take over. It hadn't worked out that way. There had been some pressure put on President Bronte by some of the alumni. Prexy had come up with this Howe guy. Nibs was unhappy about it, too.

They passed a row of boxes, and a big, beefy man with a florid face, leaned out and said, "You guys look terrible."

Nibs grabbed Stretch. "That guy has been saying things like that for two weeks. Skip it. Besides, the guy is right." Nibs didn't know who the man was, and didn't care. You couldn't argue with a man who spoke the truth.

Stretch said wildly, "He gets in my hair. He gets in my hair so much, I—"

"You what?"

Stretch looked at his big brother. "Nothing."

Nibs went in, and stood under the showers letting the hot water wash away his aches. He wished Marty and

Dirk were off the team, but with Howe running things, it was like wishing for the moon. He came out of the shower-room, a towel draped about his hips, and stared in surprise. The team had Marty and Coach Howe backed into a corner. The team was very earnest and very threatening.

Big Hippo turned and spoke up, "Nibs, we're tired of being pushed around. You and Stretch looked good today. With Tolley and Krovak, we got a chance next Saturday. We decided Marty and Dirk don't play against Tech."

Coach Howe said nervously, "Now wait a minute, men." He was a guy gone to fat with a weak face. He kept moistening his lips. Nibs was disgusted and at the same time sorry for him. Howe shouldn't play politics.

Hippo said, "We ain't waiting. You play it our way."

Marty said explosively, "I'll play, or—"

Hippo whirled on him. "You'll do nothing. Just like you have all season."

Marty glowered at Hippo, but he didn't say anything.

Nibs finished dressing, and walked out with Stretch. He felt good. With Marty out, they had a chance against Tech, next Saturday. Presnell could lose twenty games, then beat Tech and the season was a success.

Stretch was silent all the way to their room. He settled down in the battered Morris chair, and opened a book. He stared at it awhile, then threw it across the room. "I'm dumb. Tell me things."

"This Howe is a very smart boy," Nibs said softly. "He knows which side of his bread is buttered. Marty and Dirk's fathers are endowing a new field house next year. Their fathers are the alumni. Under Dad Bowles, Marty and Dirk couldn't make the team. Under Howe, they're in. That makes their old men happy.

If those guys are happy Howe will get a new contract. Ain't it nice to have money?"

Stretch got up, and walked restlessly about the room. "With Tolley and Krovak playing, we got a chance Saturday?"

"A chance," Nibs agreed. "But this Tech bunch don't play pat-a-cake. What's the matter with you?"

Stretch said with elaborate unconcern. "I'm just restless. Think I'll take a walk."

"Hey, you can't go out. It's starting to rain hard."

"I'm all wet anyway," Stretch flung back.

Nibs grinned at the closed door. When he had been a sophomore back, he had felt the same way at the thought of Tech. When Stretch had three years of playing under his belt, he would take it like Nibs did. Nibs crawled into bed, adjusted his sore spots, and dropped off to sleep.

NIBS was glad Monday was an off day. He still ached from Saturday's battle. Tech was bigger and tougher than Bordon. Nibs' face twisted wryly.

Coach Howe addressed the men in the locker room. "You men shouldn't blame Marty. He tells me if the blocking was better—"

Somebody made a ribald sound. Coach Howe flushed. "We don't want trouble among us. We'll work hard this week, and—"

Nibs glanced grinningly at Stretch. Stretch wasn't paying attention to anything. Stretch had troubles of his own. He sneezed, and honked into a handkerchief. Nibs frowned. Stretch had come in Saturday night wringing wet. It looked like the big clown was catching himself a nice, sweet cold.

The team got up abruptly in the middle of Howe's words. They filed out of the room, and Nibs went with them.

Rocky stood at the door. Rocky was a big man, with an easy, pleasant way. He had a nice voice, that could get under a guy's hide. "They've taken over, Nibs," he said softly. "I'm not blaming them. Most of them are seniors. This is their last crack at Tech. You've got a big responsibility, Nibs. They look to you. You got to keep them working. What's the matter with Stretch?"

"He got wet Saturday night. Now it's running out his nose." Rocky's words made Nibs sober. He knew how the team felt. Getting kicked around by Tech two years in a row wasn't exactly enjoyable. Okay. If taking over things from Howe would turn the trick, Nibs was for it.

"Tell Stretch to take care of it," Rocky said. "Both of you are going to be needed pretty bad Saturday."

Tuesday, Stretch's cold was worse. His work was dull and listless. Howe was still coach in name, and he tried to live up to it. He kept picking at Stretch's work.

Nibs finally said in a harsh voice, "Lay off him. Stretch can hardly keep his head up. He's got a cold."

Howe said stiffly, "He shouldn't be out here then."

"You tell him." Nibs turned away. "I been trying to."

Howe sent Stretch in early. Nibs watched him leave with worried eyes. The big, beefy man, who had yelled at them Saturday, was in the stands watching the practice. He said something as Stretch passed.

Nibs started over, but Stretch held his temper, and walked on by. Nibs wondered why the big guy kept opening his mouth.

He finished the practice, and hurried to their room. Stretch was sneezing all over the place, when Nibs came in.

"You taking something for that?" Nibs demanded.

"Taking something," Stretch re-

peated plaintively. He waved a hand at a formidable array of bottles. "Everytime I hear of something, I go get it. I feel terrible."

"You oughta see a Doc."

"It's just a cold. I'll throw it off tomorrow."

Nibs lay awake, listening. Stretch's breathing was harsh. Nibs needed Stretch badly Saturday, if he was going to do any good against Tech. Rocky's words came back, and suddenly the responsibility crushed down upon Nibs.

Nibs wouldn't let Stretch out the next day. "You stay in bed," he ordered. "That's the best thing you can do."

He told Howe about it. Marty, listening, sniffed.

Nibs felt the anger come up and choke him, but he kept his hands open. He guessed he could stand Marty a few more days. He went out on the field, worried about Stretch. The big, beefy man called to him, "You don't think you're going to do any good Saturday?"

Nibs looked at him curiously, "Mister, you can get my brother excited, but you're wasting your time trying to needle me. Why don't you go soak your head?"

He turned away, grinning at the man's outraged howl.

Nibs' mind wasn't on practice. He was thinking of Stretch, of what Rocky said. He wished Rocky was handling things. Almost, he even wished the team hadn't rebelled against Howe. Then at least, if they lost, it couldn't be pinned on Nibs.

After practice, he hurried to the room. That rest should be doing Stretch good. He opened the door, and stared in disbelief. Stretch was industriously plying a broom.

Nibs stepped back from a cloud of dust, and yelled, "What the hell is this? I told you to stay in bed."

Stretch leaned on the broom han-

dle, regarding Nibs owlshly. "Read once where more guys die in bed than any other place. Not going catch ole Stretch there. Huh un. Going out on my feet, looking good."

Nibs noticed Stretch had on his best suit. He had on Nibs' newest tie, too. Nibs took a step, and said, "You crazy—" He stopped short, and sniffed. "Oh, oh." His eyes caught the bottle, on the table. "You're drunk."

Stretch leered at him. "Don't be mad, Nibsy. Stretch saved you some." He wobbled, and bent to his work.

The broom banged Nibs' shins, and he swore. He grabbed Stretch, and pushed him into a chair. "Why the broom?"

Stretch said plaintively, "Stretch didn't want a dirty room when they come for him. Stretch is gonna—"

"Sober up," Nibs finished. "How come you to get on this anyway?" Nibs never had trouble that way before. Stretch wasn't a drinking man.

Stretch clearly looked at Nibs. "Doctor said drink whiskey and go to bed."

"Okay," Nibs said with relief. The doc oughta know. He took the tie off Stretch, handling it carefully. He got the coat off before Stretch protested. "You're going to bed," Nibs said, hauling him down. "And stay there."

"One drink, Nibsy. One drink with ole Stretch."

Nibs didn't want the drink. But he knew how to handle a gentleman who was tight—you humored him. Nibs took a light, quick one, and Stretch was satisfied. He got Stretch into bed. He undressed quickly himself, and crawled in. He was so tired he could hardly think. He was glad Stretch had finally seen a doctor. He heard Stretch stir restlessly, then Nibs dropped off to sleep.

NIBS awoke suddenly, and sat upright. The opening and closing of the door had penetrated his

sodden slumber. He reached over, and Stretch wasn't there. He got up, and fumbled for the switch. He snapped it on, and stood blinking at the empty bed. The bottle was gone too. Nibs swore in a steady stream. He was surprised to see it was only ten o'clock. He had to get Stretch before someone saw and reported him.

Nibs pulled on trousers over his pajamas, slipped on his shoes, and threw on a topcoat, as he ran downstairs. He looked up the street. Stretch was orating to the street lamp.

Nibs said, "Is he packing a load!"

He hurried up, and took hold of Stretch. He said positively, "This time you stay in bed."

Stretch raised his bottle hand. "Here's Howe," he yelled.

Nibs thought Stretch was going to take another drink. He jerked the bottle from Stretch's hand, and froze as he heard a familiar voice.

Stretch had been pointing. Stretch had been telling Nibs Coach Howe was here. Nibs faced the coach, still holding the bottle.

"This is what you call training?" Howe asked softly. He was highly pleased with the situation. Marty stood behind him, a broad grin on his face.

Nibs screwed his face up earnestly. "I wasn't drinking. The doctor told Stretch—"

Stretch suddenly yelled, "I train alla time." He took off in a dilly of a dive, and Coach Howe didn't have any legs. Howe went down, and pulled Nibs with him. Struggling to push Nibs off him, Howe got a whiff of Nibs' breath.

Nibs thought Howe was going to burst. "So you haven't been drinking. And Stretch is just playing games. You two are through. Try and unstick that." He limped down the street, Marty following.

Nibs watched Howe limp away.

Stretch was a blocking fool. Then Nibs remembered Howe's words, and was very sick. Missing Saturday's game would be like missing Hedy Lamarr's wink.

Stretch muttered, "Ole Howe said we didn't train. I showed him, huh Nibs?"

Nibs sighed. "You showed him a lot of things. You are a handful tonight. C'mon, let's walk it off."

They walked a long time. Stretch came to, and said, "Hey, didn't I see Coach Howe tonight?"

"You bumped into him," Nibs said gravely.

Stretch was concerned. "I hope he didn't notice."

"Your contact with him was good," Nibs assured.

"Gee, that's great. I was a little worried."

Nibs thought, wait until morning. Wait until your head clears. You *will* have a headache then.

They walked back to their room, and climbed into bed. Stretch said drowsily, "Cold's better. The Doc bringing that whiskey around fixed me up."

"That's good. What?" Nibs sat up-right.

"The Doc bought me a bottle." Stretch's voice was sleepy. "Nibs don't be sore. You know that big, fat guy, who's been riding me. I bet him we'd win, Saturday."

"W-h-a-t?"

"Sure. You know that money we had saved up for my schooling. I bet him that. It's safe, isn't it, Nibs. That's why I went out in the rain. I was nervous about it."

Nibs said bitterly, "Sure. Marty will make it safe."

Stretch didn't hear him. Stretch was asleep.

Nibs lay awake a long time. There was fifteen hundred in Stretch's account. So that was why the big guy hung around. He was trying to needle

someone into a bet. And Stretch would have to fall for it. Nibs' insides were gone. That was the last of the money their Dad had left them. If they lost it, Stretch might have to quit school. At least for awhile. Nibs dropped off in troubled slumber, thinking of doctors carrying big, brown bottles in their bags. He dreamed he crossed Tech's goal-line time after time. The ball would turn into a big, brown bottle, and the referee would take it away, and drink up Nibs' touchdown. Nibs spent a hell of a night.

He broke the news hard to Stretch, in the morning. "We're out. Kicked off. Howe saw us, and thought we were both drunk. He was half-right as usual. What about this doctor?" An idea was faintly glimmering Nibs' head.

Stretch groaned, "If we don't play, that bet—"

"Yeah," Nibs said harshly. Crying wasn't any good now. They needed more than that. "What about that doctor?"

"Rocky sent him over. If Rocky thought it was a good idea to take the stuff, it was all right with me."

Nibs nodded thoughtfully. If Rocky sent the doctor over, there was a chance of squaring things with Prexy. Nibs reached for his coat.

Stretch went with him. Rocky was still in bed.

Rocky called down, "Wait in the living room."

NIBS couldn't sit still. He wandered about the room, looking at pictures of past Presnell teams. "This one was really good," he told Stretch. "Back in 1922, they swept everything in the country. That big guy, in the center, is Whips Caldwell. He could do everything." He frowned at Whips Caldwell. "I've seen him some place lately."

Rocky walked in, knotting his bath-

robe. His face was cold. He had evidently heard about last night, too. "The team depended on you, Nibs, and you let them down. That's pretty rotten."

Nibs blurted, "Did you send a doctor to see Stretch?"

Rocky's face was puzzled. "No. What's that got to do—"

Nibs stared. "You didn't? Okay, we'll see you later." He dragged Stretch out of the door.

"Tell me things," Stretch said, as Nibs searched a phone directory. "What am I, a dummy?"

"Yeah. Eight doctors in this town. I want to see them."

They called on the first doctor. Nibs rang the bell. When the doctor answered, Nibs said, "Is this the one?"

Stretch said, "No," glancing apologetically at the doctor.

"So long, Doc," Nibs yelled, dragging Stretch after him. "We gotta see a doctor."

Four times, they repeated that performance. Each time, Stretch had never seen the doctor.

The last, three doctors were out of town, and wouldn't be back until tomorrow. Stretch said, "We've cut classes, and run our legs off. Did you get hit too hard last Saturday?"

Nibs was patient. "You heard Rocky say he didn't send a doctor." He frowned darkly. "We gotta find the doctor to learn who sent him."

"What good is that going to do?"

"Wait until we see those three doctors tomorrow. I got ideas."

"You mean those ideas got you," Stretch said darkly.

Friday, they started out again. Stretch didn't know the first two doctors. They had to wait until almost dark before the last one returned. Stretch didn't know him either.

"Hah" Nibs said. "Now, we'll try something else."

He wouldn't answer Stretch's ques-

tions. Stretch wailed, "We're heading towards the stadium. Howe won't listen to us."

"I'm not looking for Howe," Nibs said shortly.

They arrived at the dressing-room entrance, just as most of the players were leaving. Howe came out, and Nibs and Stretch ducked into the shadows.

"I'm gonna catch another cold," Stretch howled. "Who we waiting for?"

Marty and Dirk came through the door.

Nibs stepped out, and grunted, "This guy."

He caught Marty's arm, and said, "Dirk, beat it."

Dirk looked at Nibs' face, and walked hastily away.

Marty blustered, "Don't beg me. I can't put you back."

Nibs said softly, "You were pretty smart hiring that phony doctor. You knew if Stretch thought Rocky sent him, Stretch would do anything the guy said. You brought Howe over to see us. Catching us outside was even better."

Marty said, "I don't know what—"

Nibs slapped him hard across the mouth. That was a mistake. Marty exploded a fist in Nibs' teeth. The guy could handle his fists. He banged away, and everytime he landed, he cut Nibs.

Stretch said anxiously, "Boy, you're bleeding like a packing house. Maybe I should take over."

Nibs bled all right. But his breathing was still okay. He spat out a mouthful of gore, and waded in. All he needed was one solid punch to pin down this Fancy Dan.

Marty was getting confident. He danced around, and the sneer was big on his face.

Nibs got in close. He pawed Marty's fists away, and bludgeoned one deep into Marty's stomach. Marty doubled up, pain and surprise marching across

his face. Nibs reached behind him, and threw one. He threw it like a Whitlow Wyatt curve. Big, and sweeping and hard.

Marty's mouth popped open. He sagged slowly, and Nibs blasted him down with another one. Marty lay on the ground, the glaze making his eyes look stupid. Nibs reached for him, and everything went out of Marty.

"Don't hit me," he whimpered. "I hired a salesman going through town. I told him it was a joke. I was going to tell Howe."

Nibs said, "Skip it," and turned away.

The big, beefy man, who bet Stretch, came out of the shadows. "Hey, wait a minute. I want to talk to—"

Nibs was a little tired of this guy. He hit him with a sweetheart of a right. The big guy went down, and sat there, rubbed his jaw dazedly. "You shouldn't have done that."

Nibs licked his knuckles thoughtfully. "No," he agreed. "This hand is all skinned up. I should've used my left."

He walked down the street, Stretch at his heels.

"Nibs, I don't get it."

"Because the team turned to me, Marty blamed both of us for getting kicked off. He hired that salesman to make a sucker out of you, and caught me, too. When Howe saw us, he could kick us off, and the team couldn't say anything. Then, Marty and Dirk would play."

Stretch said, "Why, the dirty — We get to play tomorrow?"

"He is. I'm not sure. We'll see Rocky in the morning. He'll listen now. And he'll know what to do."

Stretch bathed and dressed Nibs' cuts. The cuts hurt like the devil, but Nibs felt fine. There was a big chance that everything could be straightened out. He turned over on his side.

"Stretch," he said, through the darkness of their room. "Don't take any more bottles from strange guys."

"Not me. Not if you are the guy, who's coming after me."

Stretch woke up in the morning, and shook Nibs awake. He looked at Nibs critically. "You look like the map of China." He turned his head at a knock, and called, "Come in."

Rocky came in, saw Nibs, and whistled. "You been arguing with a she-bear? You guys play today."

Nibs said eagerly, "Then you know about—"

Rocky shook his head. "I don't know anything. All I know is that Howe is gone. I'm the coach today. If we do good, maybe I keep on. If not—" He let Nibs guess the rest.

NIBS looked the Tech men over carefully. They were big guys all right. They had a good season behind them, and they were cocky. But with Tolley and Krovak out here, and Rocky on the bench, directing things, it didn't look too bad.

Nibs said to the team before the kick-off, "This is it, fellas. Last crack for most of us at Tech."

Stretch moaned, "I'm thinking of that fifteen hundred."

Nibs gave him a hard look. "Then you better play like it."

It started fast. They kicked to Tech, and Tech came roaring back. They hit at Nibs' spot, and the blockers broke against him, like surf against a sea-wall. Nibs got his hands on LeRoy, Tech's great back, and they went down.

LeRoy looked him over, and said, "If you look like that now, how are you going to look when it's over?"

"Stick around and see, pal," Nibs grinned.

Tech went from their fifteen to Presnell's forty in five plays. LeRoy carried three times. He banged the center, skirted an end, then smashed

the weak side. He was a lot of ball-player. Nibs felt it in a dozen places on his body. Presnell held, and LeRoy kicked a high twister. Tolley caught it, and Stretch and Nibs cleared his path. Tolley went to the thirty before he was downed. Nibs called the plays. They ran three at the line, then kicked. LeRoy grabbed it, and took it past midfield before Stretch knocked him over.

It was that way all during the first quarter. When Presnell got the ball, they couldn't keep it. Tech's plunges kept biting deeper. Near the end of the quarter, Tech scored. LeRoy threw a low, hard pass. The Tech end stood on the goal-line, and made the catch. He stepped across, and Tech had six points. LeRoy kicked the point as the quarter ended.

They changed goals, and Tech came battering back. Rocky gave Stretch and Nibs a rest. While they were out, Tech scored again. This time, it was straight power, with LeRoy and Hightshoe alternating. The kick was missed. The half ended with Presnell on the down end of a 13 to 0 score.

Rocky was quiet-voiced in the dressing room. "I wanted this game bad. I had a chance to take over next year, if things went all right. We just met a tougher bunch today. You guys are doing good. I'm proud of you."

"The hell they're tougher," Nibs said savagely. He looked about at bruised faces. The line had taken a lot of punishment, the backs a good deal more. "You want Rocky here next year?" he demanded. "Okay, you heard him."

Stretch said in a small voice, as they walked out, "I want Rocky back all right. I want my dough, too."

Nibs said harshly, "What do you think is eating on me?"

They lined up to receive the kick. Nibs heard the murmur from the stands. There was disappointment

and anger in the sound. The Presnell section was suffering again.

Nibs was back on the goal line. The kick was short, bouncing crazily along. He raced in, and picked it up. He went straight up the middle, the blockers walling him in. The blockers were thinking of Rocky, for they cut and slashed with abandon. Nibs went clear to the thirty.

In the huddle, Nibs said, "You feel like working?"

Stretch said, "Gimme." Tolley and Krovak nodded.

Nibs gave it to them. Stretch slammed into the tackles and got yards. Tolley went boiling around the ends and he got some more yards. They went clear to Tech's twenty-five before Stretch fumbled on a reverse, and lost the ball.

"I'm a dirty dog," Stretch mourned.

"You sure are," Nibs agreed. He wasn't worrying too much. Tech could be dented. Next time—

He sent Krovak to safety, and got back of the line. He went down under tearing cleats, and smashed the plays to bits. The line gave him some help. Tech had to kick. Tolley brought it back to the forty.

Nibs and Stretch slammed through the line. They went yard after yard. Tech braced on the twelve. Nibs sent Tolley around the end. Tolley went like a ballet dancer, light and nimble. He went to the three before he was touched. He put a hand on the Tech safety's head, pushed him off, and was over. Nibs booted the ball across. A big seven rolled on the board for Presnell.

THEY didn't make any more the rest of the quarter, but they didn't give anything away. It went that way deep into the last quarter. Presnell had the ball on their thirty. Nibs picked up four through the middle. Stretch took a slant at the tackle, and got through nicely. Tolley and

Nibs led the way. Tolley took the backer-up, and Nibs smeared the wing-back. Stretch was out in the open, throwing on the coal. He went to fifteen, and LeRoy made his shot. It was a good shot, hard and clean. It dumped Stretch back on the seventeen.

"Give me the damned thing," Stretch yelled. "That ball's got fifteen hundred in it."

Stretch didn't get anything. Tolley didn't. Nibs got four. Nibs said sagerly, "Three points is three points." His toe had rifle sights, and the score was 13 to 10.

The stands gave out wildly, but there wasn't any lift in Nibs' chest. They had three minutes. That wasn't much with Tech coming like Indians off the reservation.

Tech went to the thirty, to the forty, then crossed the mid-stripe. Nibs was back in safety, and saw the play break. LeRoy went wide to the left. Nibs moved up to meet him. LeRoy was in the clear, with two blockers in front of him. They came hard and fast, and Nibs let himself go. He hit the near blocker, smashed the man back into the other blocker and LeRoy, and all four piled up outside the sidelines.

Nibs shifted impatiently, as LeRoy drifted back. It was a long pass, and Nibs played the ball. The end got in back of him, and Nibs went high in the air. He came down running with the ball. He cut into the clear, and looked over the field. A big Tech end charged in. Nibs gave him a leg, and took it away. He was out of the mess now, and rolling. Stretch came up fast, and cut the legs from a Tech man. Nibs crossed centerfield, put on the power, and went to the sidelines. He got clear to the fifteen before he was hit.

LeRoy came in hard from the flank, as Nibs tried to cut. LeRoy dove, just as Nibs heard Stretch cry, "Nibs,

Nibs." Nibs flipped the ball over his shoulder, and went down.

He didn't need to watch Stretch to know he crossed. He could lay there, and listen to the wild roar of the crowd.

Stretch came back, and said, "And Howe said I was only a blocker." He dropped his voice, and said seriously, "Nibs, you were terrific. You got my dough back for me. Kick it, and change that score again."

A big Tech end got through, and blocked the kick. But he couldn't change the 16-13 score. Tech filled the air with desperate passes, and the gun went off.

Stretch hurried Nibs off the field. "I want my dough. I want to see Rocky's face. Boy, weren't we something?"

They went into the locker room, and Nibs said, "Rocky, there's your contract."

Rocky smilingly drew a paper from his pocket. "Here's my contract. I got it last night. It didn't hurt things for you guys not to know."

A big, beefy man stepped out of the mob of congratulating alumni, and said, "That looked like a Presnell team."

Stretch yelled, "That's the guy. Where's my dough?"

The big man glared at Nibs. "I was trying to say last night you guys had enough fight without betting. I was gonna give the money back, then you hit me. I decided you'd either win the game, or lose the dough. Now, I lose fifteen hundred."

Rocky said in astonishment, "Nibs, you hit Whips Caldwell? Whips, you didn't say anything about it."

Nibs knew then why the picture in Rocky's room looked familiar. It was the same Whips, maybe a little over the weight, a little graver. "I didn't know," Nibs stammered.

Whips snorted. He glowered at

Rocky. "You think I'd go around bragging about being socked. A lot of things Nibs didn't know. Old man Hammond and Stevens aren't all the alumni. Some of the rest of us got money too. When I heard what I did last night, and saw there were some fighters on the team, I hunted up Rocky. We talked to Prexy. He changed his mind. He changed his mind about a lot of things." He unbuttoned his coat, and started to take

it off. "No guy can hit me, and grin about it."

Stretch yelled, "Hey, you saw Nibs in action last night, and again today. You mean you're going to—"

Whips looked at Nibs' huge figure, saw the battered, grinning countenance, and remembered some things. He put his coat back on. "No," he said slowly. "No," and he was positive about it this time. "But I'm sure going to tell him some things."

SPORTS FACTS: WHAT'S THE SCORE?

For eleven years Trinity College, now Duke, failed to score a point in her opening game, 1894-1905.

Oklahoma U. defeated Kingfisher, 157-0 in 1919; yet had three consecutive tie games.

Yale holds the all-time defensive record, having protected her goal line from being crossed for 30 consecutive games from 1891 to 1893.

From 1909 to 1911, Marquette U and Notre Dame tied. But the next year Notre Dame achieved a 69-0 victory.

Temple U. lost but one game in 1932; so the next year they hired a new coach.

In 1916, Georgia Tech rolled up a total of 425 points, defeating

Cumberland 222-0, in one game, but only succeeded in tying Washington and Lee, 7-7.

Oberlin scored only 13 points in 1936, to her opponents' 378.

Washington U. played 9 seasons before losing a game; a total of 62 games from 1908 to 1916. 52 games were played without a tie.

In 1886, Harvard scored 765 points but lost both games in which they were scored upon, to Princeton and Yale.

Rutgers defeated Princeton in the first intercollegiate game played in the U. S.—but never defeated Princeton in the 68 years thereafter.

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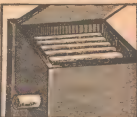
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BET ON THE BACK STRETCH!

by J. J. MEANY

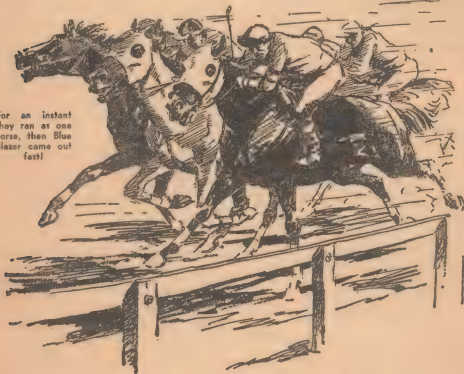
Author of "Foul-line Fusillade," etc.

"THEY'RE OFF!"

As the familiar cry echoed from the tense throng, Tom Crane crowded close to the rail, hoped his worn suit and unshaven face

marred only by a tendency to run wide at the turns; long patient drills to correct the fault, with seeming results; then the tragic day when she went lame and seemed to have left

For an instant they ran as one horse, then Blue Blazer came out fast!



Tom Crane recalled Blue Blazer's days of glory, so he knew what the four-year-old filly's comeback just had to be; another terrific duel in the stretch with Blue Blazer finally pushing her nose out in front!

would fool Morton Formsby's detectives.

Maybe he'd been a sentimental fool like his lawyer said but he couldn't sit before Judge Loane in a stuffy courtroom and fight for his inheritance with Blue Blazer attempting her big comeback.

Blue Blazer could do it, too. Tom recalled her days of glory: fine speed,

her future behind her.

Tom's father had owned Blue Blazer then, stubbornly insisting that the horse would fulfill her destiny. But when things began breaking bad financially he had been obliged to sell the horse to George Worthing, his one true friend. Of course, George had promised to sell back when the opportunity afforded.

Right now, the four-year-old filly seemed to be making a dubious effort.

Even at the distance, Tom knew that Blue Blazer had broken away badly. But with a mile to go that didn't worry him. Blazer had always been a slow starter. Hasty Pudding striding out front so jauntily didn't figure to stay there long.

"Where did you get that tip?"

The disgusted query from Sam, the railbird, aroused Tom who had touted the horse to Sam largely because of a pair of field glasses which he hoped to share.

"Straight from the feed bag, Sam."

"H'm." Sam sounded doubtful.

"Pears to me you done looked in the wrong bag."

The field had reached the quarter mark now, with Blue Blazer trailing up at the rear. Eddie Arcaro had her running easily though and that was something. Never mind that Hasty Pudding, Golden Sunset was the horse to watch. Sunset, the odds on favorite. Sunset the horse who had beaten Blazer the day she went lame. Sunset who had now won her last four races.

Tom had his heart in this horse race but his mind kept drifting back to the drama in surrogate's court from which he had gone A.W.O.L.

Just like his grandfather Henry to leave a will like that. His late grandfather had never approved of the gambling existence lead by Tom's father. When Tom Senior had been found dead at the wheel of his car leaving just enough insurance to satisfy his creditors, Henry had been among those at the family councils who called it suicide.

"Scalawag," Henry had snorted, after expressing the fear that young Tom seemed to have inherited his father's mania for gambling.

Then Henry himself had passed to the great beyond, leaving a will that

put his grandson on an allowance for a probationary period.

ON THIS, his twenty-first birthday, young Tom was due to inherit his grandfather's estate, provided in the judgment of the court he had proved himself financially responsible. Otherwise, the money passed to Morton Formsby, an obscure cousin.

Leave it to Morton to make the most of the will's joker. Formsby had hired detectives to trail him day and night. For months Tom had almost feared to put a penny in a gum machine for fear of being accused of speculation.

As the day of decision neared, Tom became acutely aware that it coincided with the running of the Bixby Mile in which Blue Blazer had been entered far in advance.

Apprised of the situation, Owner George Worthing had made a sporting gesture, offered to scratch Blue Blazer if Tom desired. But Tom wouldn't have it that way. Blue Blazer had been nursed along carefully until now she seemed ready. The Blazer had a right to her chance at recaptured glory.

At his elbow, Sam the railbird used the glasses. "Hasty Pudding don't look so hasty right now," he opined. "She's beginning to falter."

Tom smiled. "Take your eyes off the Pudding," he advised. "That horse might as well be at home in the stable."

Out of force of habit, Tom glanced around to see if Formsby's detectives had shadowed him to the track. Probably not. Probably their job was done when they had spotted him this forenoon as he made a token bet on Blue Blazer in a downtown poolroom.

Undoubtedly the incident had been reported in detail. By now, the name of Blue Blazer would be brandished about the courtroom like the unknown

blonde in a divorce action.

Once caught, Tom had decided to increase his stake at the track. Thus his present disguise, although he admitted ruefully that it smacked of locking the barn door after the horse had been stolen.

Too bad he hadn't placed that pool-room bet by proxy. For that matter, why had he wagered at all?

Tom realized that the indiscretion might easily cost him his inheritance. He had listened to his heart instead of his head. Still, he reflected, he probably would do the same thing over again. He just couldn't let Blue Blazer make her bid without backing her solidly.

That was his unwritten inheritance, the one from his father. His pockets bulged with pasteboards, all he could spare from his allowance. He had bought a few for Sam, also.

They were in the backstretch now. "Hasty Pudding is all done," observed Sam. "She's third-fourth-fifth . . ."

Tom merely nodded.

He wondered if his Grandfather Henry hadn't ever gambled. Somehow, he had a pile of money. It seemed to Tom that few great fortunes had ever been accumulated without some form of speculation. Stocks maybe, or real estate. What was the difference? It was all gambling whether you did it in boom days with stock or bet on a flesh and blood proposition like Blue Blazer that you loved and cherished.

Still, he didn't suppose Judge Loane would see it that way. The name Blue Blazer wouldn't mean any more to him than Myrtle, the unknown blonde. Formsby's lawyer would fight to the hilt and the Judge would make his decision on what it said in the will.

Sam's voice jarred his thoughts. "They're at the turn," Sam revealed. "Golden Sunset's moving up."

Tom borrowed the glasses. "Blue Blazer is moving up, too," he said quietly.

Neat worker, that Arcaro, thought Tom—waiting until Sunset made her bid.

A wild thought surged into Tom's mind. Suppose he lost the inheritance? He wondered if Helen would understand. He hoped so. They were engaged to be married and he knew Helen loved him for himself alone, not his pending fortune. But he hadn't told her about those detectives. And Helen liked nice things . . .

Tom kept the glasses trained on Golden Sunset as the field made the turn into the stretch. Don Meade, her rider, knifed his way through on the inside, saved ground. She was third now . . . second . . . out in front, with the field closely bunched.

Tom groaned.

Blue Blazer was running wide. All those long patient drills for nothing. She hadn't cured after all. Here it was, her one fault, cropping up at the crucial moment.

Then the mare began to straighten out and Tom realized something with gladdened heart. She hadn't run wide of her own accord. With the field congested, Arcaro had to take the longer route, wide on the outside.

Running straight as a dye, she responded to his touch, breezed by the others and shortened the gap until she trailed the leader by only a length.

Don Meade on Sunset looked around nervously, reached for the whip.

Guiltily, Tom offered the glasses back to their owner.

Sam took one look at his companion's face and shook his head. "You keep 'em," he said, "I'm too busy with this here rabbit's foot."

There were only two horses now, Golden Sunset and Blue Blazer. Both well ridden, it was horse against horse. Sweat glistened from her

brown body as Blue Blazer closed like a well oiled piece of machinery.

Still under the whip, Sunset with a fresh burst of speed, began to pull away. But Blue Blazer wouldn't be denied. Inch by inch, she fought her way up alongside the favorite, looked her one-time conqueror in the eye. For a split second they ran as one horse. Then Arcaro leaned low, whispered something soothing in Blue Blazer's ear.

In a cloud of dust, they dueled it out in the stretch until at the finish few people knew the answer. But Tom had his eyes glued on Blue Blazer as she pushed her nose out in front.

Sam breathed heavily on Tom's neck. "A photo finish," he sighed. "Keep your fingers crossed."

Tom handed back the glasses. "We collect, Sam," he said calmly. "Blue Blazer won."

When the judges made it official, Sam's face became wreathed in smiles. "You didn't lie none, mister," he grinned. "Man, you sure got that info straight from the feed bag."

IN the back seat of a taxi, Tom wished tardily that the fight for the will had been put over. They

couldn't argue that he had spent his allowance unwisely when his wager had returned many times the original investment. Or could they?

Back home, his telephone jingled.

"I'm still in the courtroom," announced Tom's lawyer. "Judge Loane just made his decision — in your favor."

Dazedly, Tom thanked him and hung up.

He had a little unfinished business.

Tidied up, he paid a visit to a certain bookmaker and collected his modest wager.

The bookmaker grumbled profusely as he shelled out. "If I never hear the name Blue Blazer again," he beefed, "it's soon enough."

"Why, I let you off easy," countered Tom. "Bet most of mine at the track."

"YOU did," agreed the bookie, "but what about those phone-bets from the courtroom?"

Tom thought he saw the light. "My lawyer?"

The bookmaker bit hard on his cigar. "Both lawyers," he grouched, "and Judge Loane."



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**DON'T MISS A GREAT
VALUE — See Page 2**



THE SPORT-O-QUIZ

Complete Sports Special Feature

by JAMES MACKIE

HOW'S your sports I. Q.? Below are a set of 10 brain sprainers that should work your thinking apparatus overtime. Some are real toughies and others you'll probably have on the tip of your tongue. Allow yourself 10 points for each correct answer and rate your score on the following basis: 100 points, professional; 80 points, semipro; 60 points, amateur; 40 points, novice.



1. Red Grange, the immortal Galloping Ghost of Illinois, played in 20 games during his three years of All-America football fame from 1923-25. How much ground did Red gain for the Illini in those games? Was it one-half mile, one mile or two miles?

2. What famous Negro opera singer was once an All-America end in football at Rutgers? His son also started as an end at Cornell last year until Coach Ed McKeever changed him into a halfback.

3. When a football referee folds his arms in front of him, what does that signify?



4. What is a basketball "goon"? Is it a player used as a decoy in an attack, a tall player or a player who never gets off the bench?

5. How many years ago since basketball was introduced as a big-time sport in Madison Square Garden, New York?

6. Which clubs participated in the 1945 World Series and which one annexed the blue ribbon of the diamond?



7. Are there any limitations on weight in boxing's heavyweight division?

8. Who held the heavyweight championship of the world prior to Joe Louis' ascendancy to the throne?

9. Name the winner of the Stanley Cup, emblematic of world pro hockey supremacy, in season 1944-45.





10. When pari-mutuel betting on horse-racing was introduced in New York State in 1939, the suggestion that the Empire State could collect \$10,000,000 in taxes was ridiculed. What is the estimated "take" for the 1946 racing season in New York?

Don't Look Now! Turn Page Upside Down for Answers!

500,000.
betting handle to be approximately \$33.-

York expects the State's share of the 1946

10. Governor Thomas E. Dewey of New

9. Montreal Canadiens.

8. Jimmy Bradstock.

mate heavyweight.

7. No. Any fighter who scales more

than 175 pounds is recognized as a legit-

Detroit won the seven-game series.

6. Chicago Cubs of the National League

and Detroit Tigers of the American League.

5. Ned Irish, a former sports writer,

installed the hoop game in the Garden about

a dozen years ago and the rise of basket-

ball popularity since has been phenomenal.

The 1946-47 season promises to top all pre-

vious records in attendance.

4. A "goon" is a nickname pinned on

players who stand six feet six inches or

more.

3. Ned Irish, a former sports writer,

installed the hoop game in the Garden about

a dozen years ago and the rise of basket-

ball popularity since has been phenomenal.

The 1946-47 season promises to top all pre-

vious records in attendance.

2. Paul Robeson.

1. The wearer of "Old 77" gained more

strikes for 81 touchdowns.

1. The wearer of "Old 77" gained more

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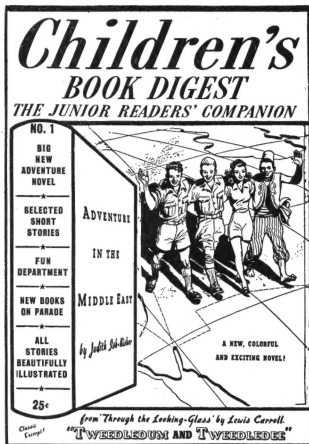
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